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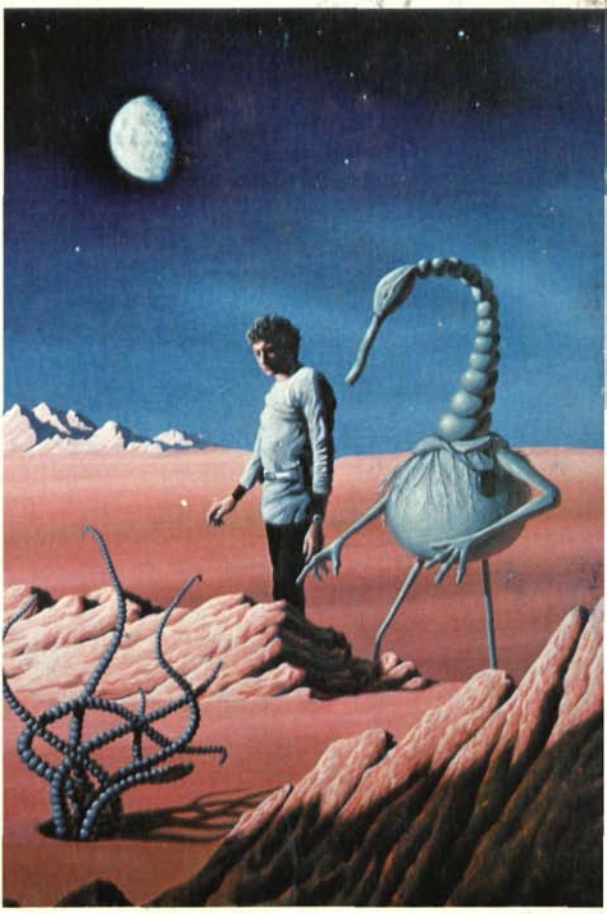

THE AMOROUS UMBRELLA
MARVIN KAYE

INTERVIEW/ANDRE NORTON
BRIAN M. FRASER

OFF-THE-RACK SPACE SUITS
WALTER B. HENDRICKSON, JR.

EVENING PROMENADE
WAYNE WIGHTMAN

THE SMALL ONE
M. LINDHOLM

THE SONGS ARE OF EARTH
R. C. STEINHAUER

WONDERS OF THE GODS?
J. J. MILLER

AMAZING FACTS
THOMAS A. EASTON

BOOK REVIEWS
TOM STAICAR

GAMES FEN WILL PLAY
GREG COSTIKYAN

ILLUSTRATIONS BY FREEMAN, PETILLO, WURTS & MAVOR

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IN THIS ISSUE

THE INCREDIBLE UMBRELLA is back! Marvin Kaye has done it again with the further adventures of Professor James Phillimore — once known as J. Adrian Fillmore (Gad!) — romping through yet another literary wonderland. In this excerpt from the forthcoming Doubleday novel, "The Amorous Umbrella", we find Phillimore seeking that which motivates us all most profoundly: Love! And, as in life, of course, the quest is all.

With his fourth appearance on our pages, Wayne Wightman delivers a wallop packed with plenty of tickles and plenty of rubs. In "Evening Promenade", the Chaplinesque character Gorman Rimly seems to have rose-colored contacts permanently fused to each cornea and it may just be the best way to go.

Darrell Schweitzer returns with a funny caper and an old legend for pure, lighthearted entertainment . . . also, good friend Paul Dellinger entices with his "Girl of My Dreams."

Tapping the other side of your hemisphere are some offerings that contemplate evil, savagery, a bit of mystery and more. Dig in and taste it all.

A bright variety of features and regulars dresses up the opening pages in admirable fashion, we think you'll agree. Tom Easton offers us his views on possible futures, Brian Fraser has a fascinating talk with noted fantasy writer Andre Norton, Walter Hendrickson gives us the lowdown on the latest space-wear and regulars Tom Staicar, Greg Costikyan and Britton Bloom present news about the latest books, games and science facts.

Illustrators Gary Freeman, Janny Wurts and Scott Mavor have each created their special perceptions to enhance the prose. And on our cover, Robert Petillo interprets "A Martian Odyssey" by Stanley Weinbaum.

Be sure to read our important announcement on page 29 — it's about consolidation, progress and good things for everyone.

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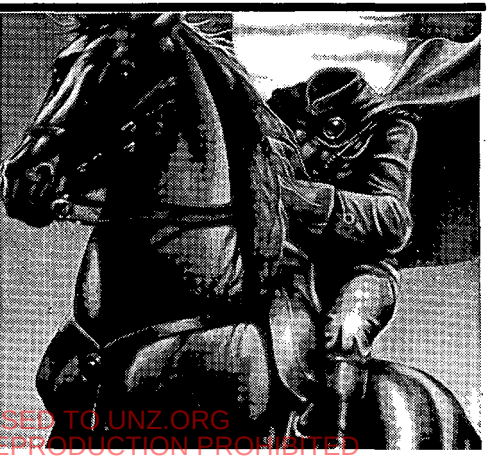

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October, 1980

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PUTTING THE PAST INTO THE FUTURE

INTERVIEW

With Andre Norton

by Brian M. Fraser

A SPECIAL ENCHANTMENT and mystical quality to the science fiction novels of Andre Norton, one of science fiction's most popular authors for decades, has been the intriguing pull of the past, the speculative possibilities of which fascinate her, she says.

"I've thought that the most exciting thing that could ever happen to anybody would be to land on another planet and find a ruined city," says the SF writer, "and then face the idea of what kind of people had lived there and what did they do."

Ms. Norton recalls reading Edwin Balmer's *WHEN WORLDS COLLIDE* and *AFTER WORLDS COLLIDE*, two books which were "very early but very well done," she says. "In *AFTER WORLDS COLLIDE*, when they move onto the new planet, they find the Domed City that is totally deserted. It gives you sort of a chill just to read about them exploring it."

A similar archaeological puzzle pervades many of Norton's own SF novels, a sub-plot featuring mysterious aliens which she calls the Forerunners. Their inexplicable artifacts, mysterious structures, and remnants of technology are uncovered on many planets through the Galaxy.

The incredible power and sophisticated technical advance of this unknown race are leavened with the enigma of why they disappeared, in books from as far back as Norton's 'Solar Queen' series, including *SARGASSO OF SPACE* (1955) and *PLAGUE SHIP* (1956), and in *THE ZERO STONE* (1968) and its sequel *UNCHARTED STARS* (1969), a secret which is still not solved in the more recent novel bearing the title of this alien archaeological search, *FORERUNNER FORAY* (1973).

"But there may be more than one civilization among the Forerunners, you see," the author explains. "Because we know now that our planet's system is relatively new, while the closer you are to the centre of the Galaxy, the older the planets are. So there could have been wave after wave of civilization—Rise-and-Fall—before we ever developed human life here."

"There's no reason why, if one could travel in space, they would not find remnants of civilization so old that there was nothing left, except perhaps Cyclopean ruins," she says, explaining the reasoning behind the Forerunner artifacts found in her fiction of Man's far future in space.

Analogies to our Past

"You can develop different portions of it and develop different civilizations," says Norton, "you don't have to define it as any *one* civilization—just like we have the Rise-and-Fall of Egypt, and of Babylonia and of Greece," she adds, making an analogy to Earth's history.

"They have all left remains but the civilizations themselves are gone. And some of them, like the Olmecs, we know nothing about. Why did they build those great big heads and leave them here and there? And heads that are plainly those of Negroes. Who were they? We know nothing about them."

"And we know nothing about those

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recent discoveries in France, those drawings on the walls of caves which show people in very modern-looking clothing. They've found scraps of bone that are also computers. Now what kind of civilization was that?

"I really believe that we've had a series of High Civilizations which were wiped out by Great Catastrophes from time to time and that the Biblical Flood is the memory of one of those catastrophes," states SF author Andre Norton.

"But what I do think may have happened is that there were civilizations which rose to very high points technically. For example, there was a lump of quartz found in California, it was split open and there was a 'spark plug' inside," she says, amazed.

And, according to Norton, they have found electric batteries in Sumerian tombs.

Pyramid Power

"And who did the paintings on the walls of the Egyptian tombs," she asks, relating ancient mysteries to the current fascination and popularity of the exhibits of King Tut. "Way underground in the dark, there is no sign on the ceiling of any torch or lamp. Yet they must have had some light.

"Then what about the Great Pyramid of Egypt which has something queer about it. They've used radar on it trying to find out, but there's something in there that baffles any kind of investigation.

"It's very intriguing," says the animated author, "because there are so many things that are remnants, that were apparently highly-civilized and then just disappeared. And if these catastrophes occurred—and we know they did because we know the poles changed at one time—then all the people who would survive would be little remnants here or there of primitive people."

"Because the cities would be gone, they would be swept away and their technology would be lost."

A similar situation could even happen today, the SF writer speculates: "Because if something happened here, for example, that wiped out all the electrical power, our factories could no longer run. We'd be reduced immediately to a bare sustenance and the only people who could survive would be the bare handful that could get a living from the ground. And they would revert to a Stone Age level."

Obviously, this possible future scenario has been played many times in the science fictions stories which predict or postulate a nuclear war and post-Holocaust or aftermath worlds.

In these worlds, there are inevitably massive concrete ruins of our city skyscrapers, freeways, and non-working pieces of technology. All this would be practically semi-mythical and inexplicable to most of the peoples still surviving several generations later, just as ancient cities now uncovered present paradoxes of the past in terms of the apparently sophisticated objects from supposedly primitive civilizations.

"This is the same kind of thing as the world of Meroe in ancient Egypt," says Andre Norton, "where there is physical evidence but nothing to support it."

"And of course, I collect books now on what I call 'speculative archaeology' where these things are brought out that archaeologists themselves can't explain. And they ask questions," she adds. "For instance, I've just got a new book on the ruins in the waters off Bimini... they found great walls and roads in the sea.

"Then there's things like the Plains in Chile where they've laid out those designs which can only be seen from the air. They couldn't even have laid out those designs unless someone directed them from above.

"Plus the fact that, in England, they've found that every one of the Great Cathedrals, the holy places in England, are based on the crossing of two magnetic lines. It's things of that sort which have been just recently discovered that are of great interest and give you the ideas," says the SF writer, who now lives in Winter Park, Florida.

"Now, *MERLIN'S MIRROR* is founded

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on the background of this speculative archaeology," she says, mentioning her SF-fantasy novel based on Arthurian legend.

Archaeological Adaptation

Andre Norton makes use of her fascination with these archaeological dilemmas to write magnetic science fiction.

How? Well, she explains the origins and rationale for *THE WRAITHS OF TIME*, the novel which links a female archaeologist from the present, Tallahassee Mitford, with the mysterious power struggles within the civilization of Meroe in ancient Egypt. The result is compelling story material combining 'speculative archaeology' and some of the fantastic theories of science fiction.

"I've always been interested in Egyptian history and then I have several books from England on Meroe itself. It's fascinating because we know so little about it. They had a written language and they used Egyptian hieroglyphics for it. But nobody can translate it because it is not Egyptian; the hieroglyphics are there but they don't mean the same words as they would in Egypt.

"We know that at one time they were ruled by hereditary queens, and the Romans who fought them at one time called the Queen Candace. Well, we know now that wasn't her name," Ms. Norton explains, "it was her title—just like Pharoah was—and that it was hereditary, probably descended by the maternal line.

"Egypt did this also. No Egyptian king could rule unless he married his sister—because she was the one who carried the power. That is true of a great many of the tribes in Africa to this day, that the inheritance goes, not through the King's sons, but to the eldest son of his sister."

Norton, who was a librarian for many years before ill-health forced her to retire and continue on a full-time basis her writing of science fiction, fantasy and other types of novels, does extensive research into ancient civilizations, their historical antecedents and customs.

Societal Roles

"I've found out some interesting things about African tribes," she states. "In several of them, there were three most important women who could overrule the King at times: the Queen Mother, who wasn't naturally the King's own mother but the oldest woman of the previous generation who had been the King's wife; his sister, that would bear the heir, and his wife.

"And, do you know that, among some of the tribes, they collected the taxes?" She goes on: "They had their own set of what you would call functionaries and they did the taxes and they had quite a bit of the rule."

This political power by women was not particularly restricted to just Meroe, Egypt or Africa either, according to Andre Norton.

"Just the same is true of some of the American Indian tribes," she reveals. "For instance, among the Iroquois, no man could be a Chief unless, they say, the women raised him up, proclaimed him Chief."

Norton's research explored these functions played by men and women in past societies. "Then I became very much interested in the difference. We think of African women as being very much oppressed; we think of them as slaves. Well, that wasn't always true. In the higher civilizations, and in the more civilized African states, it was just the opposite: they owned their own property and worked it themselves; anything they worked and sold from their own property, the money was theirs."

What If. . . ?

How does she integrate this underlying sociological background into a story of speculative fiction?

"I would get interested in Meroe, then I would get interested in this idea that I've always had of the 'If Worlds': If an event had gone the other way, what would have resulted from it? This is a regular historical theory and there have been several non-fiction books written on that subject," she

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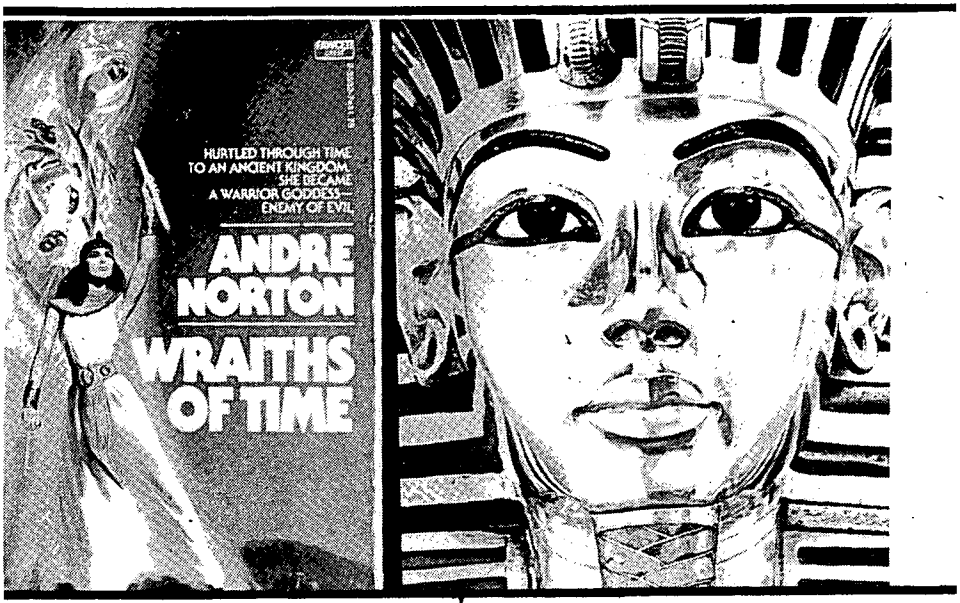

observes.

Norton contemplates a plot or storyline utilizing this combination.

"So I figured a world in which Islam had never risen. It was Islam which put an end to these early High-African civilizations; they just overran them and put everybody to the sword," she says, in an aside.

"So, if you figure that there was a civilization in Africa, which there was, around Meroe, and there was never any Mohammed, we would have had an entirely different history. Because, you see, there was one time in Mohammed's life when he was hiding out and if he had been found and killed during that time, there would never have been any wave of conquest down into Africa. She adds, "And it was the Arabs who started the slave trade in Africa, so if they had not risen to power, what would have happened?"

So, in *WRAITHS OF TIME* for instance, Norton the science fiction novelist sets up this other What If World, one which is an alternate to our world and history as we know it.

"Yes, an Alternate World," she says, "and they're tied together, because the finding of the Object-of-Power in this world was tied to the Object-of-Power in the other and could draw through Time the person who was attuned to it.

"For another thing that I came across in my reading, which I used in the book, was that a building or an object which has been used for hundreds of years for a purpose of worship or ritual is supposed to develop a power of its own. That's why some of the Great Cathedrals of Europe have this effect on people who go in them.

"It's also true of objects that are supposed to perform miracles. They have really drawn power because they have been the centerpost of belief. Power is based on belief; if you don't believe, then there's no power; they're a focus of power because they're a focus of belief."

Wild Talents

This was where Andre Norton brought in yet another science fiction idea—which has proved fact—involving ESP, or 'wild talents' as she so often calls them in her books.

Her utilization of extrasensory perception is limited, however. She won't

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write about any technique which she hasn't seen demonstrated.

"No, I'm pretty much a skeptic," she admits, "unless I see something myself or see evidence of it. I know that this (ESP) exists but it's something that cannot be controlled; you cannot produce it just like that. Either it comes at unexpected times and they can do something with it, but so far they haven't been able to control it."

In *WRAITHS OF TIME*, however, she employs an ESP technique called psychometry, which she has seen. "And it works," she asserts.

"Psychometry is holding an object and reading its history. And it can be done," Norton emphasizes. "It's very seriously used in archaeology now.

"Lethbridge, who was the first to use it, was able to locate quite a few sites by using the pendulum swinging from the hand. If anything which has been worked on or held by a human being is there, the pendulum will swing," she says, describing the methodology of psychometry.

Lethbridge, according to Norton, "was a British archaeologist who was one of the foremost authorities on the Pictish remains in England. And he used this to locate remains."

"Now, they're using it in this country. They just recently uncovered a digging site near Flagstaff, Arizona, that goes back 30,000 years."

In the novel, Tallahassee Mitford, her female protagonist or viewpoint character, comes into contact with two of these objects-of-power—an ankh or Key and a Rod of Office. She is drawn through Time into this Alternate World where she takes on the role of High Priestess at a crucial time in the civilization's history, during a confrontation which could lead to the world as we know it or along an entirely different track.

Definitions

Most of the action takes place in the past, but the book in not an historical novel, according to its author. "No, it's science fiction because it depends on two things which we are not sure of: one is this theory of history, and the other is the control of objects-of-power.

"Science fiction is things that have not occurred yet," she defines the genre. "If it's a gadget story, it can be an invention which the people have that's possible, it has not yet been invented. Or it can be a mental awakening which we are not yet able to do.

"The difference between science fiction and fantasy is that fantasy depends on magic, which, in a way, is belief. It is a belief, it is not a concrete thing. Science fiction is more concrete: you have this invention or you have something that may in the future be possible."

But her book *WRAITHS OF TIME*, Norton points out, "isn't fantasy because there is no magic in it. From this point of view, it stands on two things: one, the theory of Parallel Worlds, which is a science fiction concept; and the other is a theory that objects gain power. "Now that," she admits, "verges on magic but not enough to make it a fantasy."

Ms. Norton, who has written more than 90 novels, is quite definite on the differentiation between SF and Fantasy, from the pure space opera of her earlier books, those that fit into the Sword-and-Sorcery category to her more fantasy-oriented stories.

Her popular *WITCH WORLD* series, for instance, are fantasy, she claims, "because they're based on the idea of inherited attributes to deal with powers. You see, there's a difference between sorcery and witchcraft," she explains. "Witchcraft is inherited and it deals with the natural forces; sorcery is learned and it sometimes deals with objects that are not natural forces.

"Sword-and-Sorcery developed from the old legends, it's an outgrowth of the fairy tale. In fact," she confides, "I use basic fairy tales often for sword-and-sorcery. I had Thompson's very good

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book, *THE FOLK TALE*, which analyzes the basic elements of every single known fairy story and shows how they've changed from country to country.

"For example, *WARLOCK OF THE WITCH WORLD* is based on the old Anglo-Saxon story Childe Roland. And *YEAR OF THE UNICORN* is based on 'Beauty and the Beast'. By using these basic stories, you can just use that basic core and build up from there," says one very successful storyteller.

Writing Objectives

And author Andre Norton can compress the purposes of science fiction writing into one word.

"Escape," she says, "I think people read escape fiction. I think they need it badly. Oftentimes, I've had letters from people who have been in unfortunate situations and they tell me that my books have helped them because they were able to escape from thinking about what they've had happen.

"I had a very touching letter from a boy who was in an institution for drug addiction. He said that my story about the boy who had no face—he'd lost his face—that had helped him immensely, reading the book did.

"And if you can give anyone who is sick or is tired or has worries, if you can give him an hour's release and give him another, a different world, then you've done something," says the author, with obvious empathy to her readers.

She adds, "Also, I figure that if I write a novel which has something in it, like, for example, the Meroe story, then somebody will go to the library and ask for a book on Meroe and read more about it. Then I have accomplished something; I have opened a door for him."

In this way, she employs speculative archaeology and detailed historical research in conjunction with theories of alternate pasts and possible hidden mental talents—the fantastic starting-points of science fiction—to go beyond mere writing for entertainment to development of the reader's curiosity for other areas.

"They become interested in something entirely different from what they have known and they pursue it. If you've done that, then you've accomplished a great deal," says Andre Norton, whose popularity with readers for 45 years is the practical measure of her great success in achieving this extra benefit, from science fiction, fantasy and other forms of literature. ●

BRIAN M. FRASER teaches a series of seminars on Science Fiction in the Media, given through the Institute of Social Communications, Saint Paul University/University of Ottawa in Ottawa, Canada. He has also written extensively on SF for many publications.

READERSCOPE

BOOK REVIEWS

by Tom Staicar

The Arbor House Treasury of Modern Science Fiction. *Compiled by Robert Silverberg and Martin H. Greenberg. Arbor House. $19.95 hardcover; $8.95 paperback; also Book of the Month Club alternate and Quality Paperback Club selection.* Talk about taking on a big job! The compilers of this fat volume attempted to select stories which would have the same impact today as two epoch-making books in 1946 called *Adventures in Time and Space* by Healy and McComas, and *The Best of Science Fiction* by Groff Conklin. Those anthologies, which incidentally were published the year I was born, are recalled nostalgically and fondly as the first books to comprehensively survey the field of science fiction. Del Rey still sells a trade paperback of *Adventures in Time and Space*, a book which is essential to even the most modest SF collection.

When I read the publisher's advance announcement of this book, I yawned

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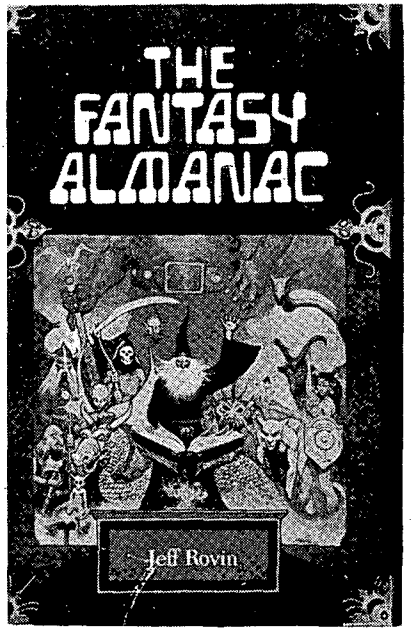
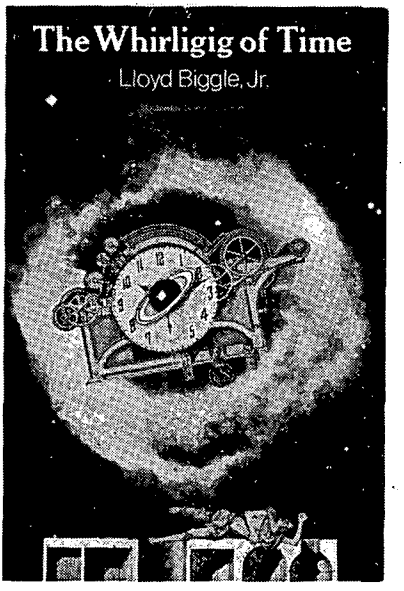
and waited for the inevitable collection of the same-old-stuff. The book turned out to be fine beyond my wildest dreams. *The Arbor House Treasury of Modern Science Fiction* is a survey of post-1946 stories which compares favorably with the earlier books in interest, historical relevance and variety. All the schools of writing are represented, with Malzberg balanced by Heinlein and Bradbury balanced by Niven. It is a 754 pages journey through the best of van Vogt, Knight, Pangborn, Russ, Aldiss, Dick, Sturgeon, Finney, McIntyre and others who have shaped the modern era of science fiction. Don't miss this one.

The Fantasy Almanac *by Jeff Rovin. E. P. Dutton, $9.95 paperback.* The back cover blurb promises: "A Who's Who and What's What of the human imagination unrestrained." Unfortunately, Jeff Rovin was not up to the ambitious task he set for himself. Rather than limit the scope of the project to a clearly defined type of fantasy or aspect of the field, Rovin tried to cover comics, films, TV shows, writers, myths, characters and more. Artists like Frank R. Paul and Chesley Bonestell are included, but not Boris Vallejo or Estaban Moroto. Writers like Robert Bloch, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Tolkien and E. R. Burroughs are covered, but not Borges, Leiber, de Camp or even Manly Wade Wellman. Stan Lee, Captain Video and Darth Vader are in company with Thongor, the Klingons and Jack Frost. The spotty, incomplete choice of material is unfortunate, making this a book which will disappoint most readers who consult it. When the item you need happens to be there, the work is accurate for the most part, especially in its coverage of myths and characters from fiction. Most items which come to mind are not listed, making the book of limited value.



The Whirligig of Time *by Lloyd Biggle, Jr. Doubleday, $8.95.* I read my first Biggle novel in 1966, when the Science Fiction Book Club offered *Watchers of the Dark*. Like thousands of others, I have since followed the career of detective Jan Darzek, the man who has been so instrumental in saving civiliza-



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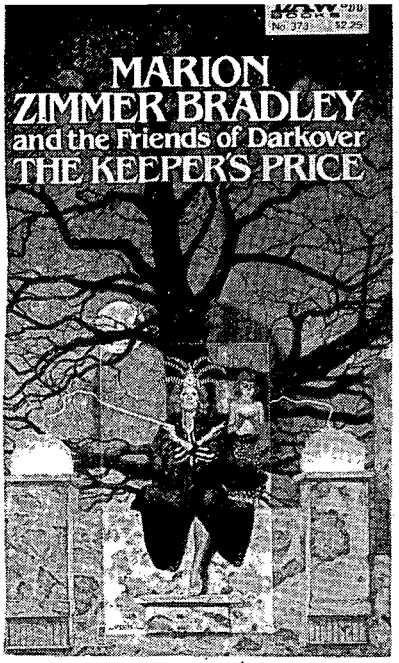
tions, planets and solar systems from destruction. In *The Whirligig of Time*, Darzek and his feisty and outspoken associate Miss Schlupe have to solve a crime involving a blackmail threat which could result in a planet inhabited by five billion people being turned into a new sun. This is actually a mystery novel, with more and more complications increasing the odds against Darzek until the final pages. The planet Vezpro is a crimeless one, but as Miss Schlupe says, all it takes is one criminal to ruin that record. The book is populated with the usual Biggle-style aliens, colorful and odd. As always, Biggle has the reader's enjoyment in mind as he weaves this suspenseful tale of science fiction.

The Keeper's Price *by Marion Zimmer Bradley and the Friends of Darkover. DAW Books, $2.25.* There is something about Marion Zimmer Bradley's series of Darkover novels which inspires the same sort of fan loyalty and excitement brought on by *Star Trek*, Sherlock Holmes and very few other fictional creations. Darkover, like the Enterprise and 221B Baker Street, is so real that people tend to believe the creation exists in reality. The Friends of Darkover began with a chance remark by Bradley when she mentioned offhand that perhaps some people who wanted to continue the discussion of Darkover might meet somewhere. The group is now a national organization, with a newsletter, fiction magazine and conventions each year.

Although Bradley never intended to write a series of novels, and personally dislikes series books, Darkover began to grow with a life of its own, attracting fans who questioned her about inconsistencies between novels she wrote in her early career as a means of getting groceries and books like *The Heritage of Hastur* and *The Forbidden Tower* which show the seasoned abilities of a mature professional at the peak of her form. Asked why she referred to Regis Hastur as "tall" in one book and "not over medium height" in another, she replied: "Because the author has a lousy memory, why do you think?"



The Friends of Darkover have excellent memories, however, as they use all the factual background of the body of work to contribute their own tales to the series in *The Keeper's Price*. This collection illuminates areas of the series which were not clearly explained or not covered in the chronology of the Darkover novels. Bradley herself contributed three stories, but the focus here is on the devoted fans who wrote Darkover tales because they couldn't wait for the next book to come out.

Some of the authors, like Jacqueline Lichtenberg and Jean Lorrah, for instance, are now professionals on their own, maintaining an interest in Darkover in addition to their own fictional worlds. Others are enthusiastic fans whose labors of love are usually confined to the pages of fanzines. Like the *Star Trek* fanzine writers, many of them will someday become professionals, building their own series of stories set in another fictional universe.

The stories are surprisingly good, "surprisingly" only because few of the

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writers have sold fiction anywhere. Most are aspiring writers, juggling with children, husbands, housework and college classes with one hand, while typing Darkover stories with the other. How the twenty-nine hours of their work are squeezed into the standard twenty-four is not explained in Bradley's introductions, although Terran versus Darkovan time might have something to do with it.

Don't read *The Keeper's Price* as your first Darkover book. However, one or two of the series will explain enough to allow full enjoyment of this collection. If you have read and liked some of Bradley's novels, you might send $1.00 to: The Friends of Darkover, Box 72, Berkeley, CA 94701, for information and a sample issue of the Darkover Newsletter.

The Darkover Concordance. *A Reader's Guide. Complete and Unabridged. By Walter Breen. Pennyfarthing Press, 2000 Center St., #1226, Berkeley, CA 94704. $8.95 paperback.* Walter Breen is Marion Zimmer Bradley's husband. He did the job that she did not want to do, that of keeping track of all the tiny details of geographical features, ranks, genealogy, races, foods, domains, concepts, ideas and other elements which are part of her Darkover series. As others have done for Middle Earth and *Star Trek*, Breen has compiled an encyclopedia, complete with appendices. Story summaries, the lineage of major characters, typical Darkovan proverbs and even some songs are included. Melisa Michaels illustrated the volume with some tasteful drawings.

Such features as the repetition of the key to symbols used in the text, thoughtfully placed at the bottom margin of each page, show the care which went into the planning of *The Darkover Concordance*. The book covers only Darkover, leaving out Bradley's novels such as *The Catch Trap* and *The House Between the Worlds*. This is an attractive and meticulously executed reference work which will delight all Marion Zimmer Bradley fans.

Hourglass Productions. **An Hour With . . .** *Cassette tapes, $4.95 each; Larry Niven, Fritz Leiber, Marion Zimmer Bradley, Isaac Asimov, Harlan Ellison, Randall Garrett. $5.95: Karen Willson and Friends. Hourglass, P.O. Box 1291, Garden Grove, CA 92643 (include 50¢ each for postage).* Most people form an impression of a writer in their minds as they read a book. Now, thanks to Hourglass, it is possible to hear leading SF and fantasy writers discuss their books, lives, influences and ideas on cassette tapes. These tapes are personal, intimate talks by the writers, giving insights into their attitudes and personalities. I was surprised by the diversity shown in the interviews. Isaac Asimov reeled off names, dates and story sales complete from memory. Larry Niven showed his personal fascination with the scientific background of his stories. Harlan Ellison told about his memories of the hard-working pulp writer phase of his early career. Karen Willson's cassette is actually a musical concert consisting of her folk-style ballads and some of David Houston's songs composed for his own novels such as *Gods in a Vortex*.

Send for the tape of a writer who has interested you and see how fascinating they are when speaking. A catalog of other tapes is available from the same address. I hope Hourglass prospers in its noble task. These are nicely produced cassettes that libraries, schools and SF readers will find informative as well as entertaining. ●

BE SURE TO READ OUR IMPORTANT MESSAGE ON PAGE 29

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by Thomas Easton

ALTERNATE WORLDS

AS A BIOLOGIST, I see two worlds before us, two alternate futures. One is optimistic, a vision of plenty and of expansion into the universe, completely in that old-time spirit of Manifest Destiny. The other, I fear, may be the more likely of the two. The other is a vision of an Earthbound humanity, restricted by shortages of energy, materials, and food.

But before I try to sketch any details of these alternate worlds, perhaps I should say a few words about my science and how it interacts with society. Biology is the study of life, its forms, functions, and interrelations. It includes applications as well, for it contributes to improvements in medicine and agriculture. The applications change the conditions of human life in certain obvious ways, since they permit larger populations and longer life expectancies. But biology also affects human life in more subtle ways; the theoretical side of the science actually acts as a shaper of human thought and society.

That may sound like a fairly radical thought, but it is true enough. Consider, for a moment, how biology must have begun. Even before the first scribes learned to write, primitive humans used their intelligence to build a familiarity with the plants and animals in their lives. Like modern primitives, they had an intimate awareness of the habits, forms, and relationships of the living things around them. Only thus could they survive.

The first records of anything we might call biology are religious and mythical records such as *Genesis*. This first book of the Bible answers the natural question of where life came from by saying, "It was created; God shaped the dust and clay of the Earth and gave it His breath; it is dirt, but dirt touched by God." It answers the questions of life's purpose by saying, perhaps because *Genesis'* authors knew of natural plant and animal reproduction or of the sowing and reaping of agriculture, that life's purpose is to multiply.

The authors of *Genesis* simply named what they saw, drew the obvious conclusions, and used their imaginations to make sense of it all (modern scientists do no more). They probably knew more than they wrote, but their words are all that survive, and these words have had profound effects on human life. Some scholars feel that the Western world's Judeo-Christian heritage is responsible for its current ecological problems. The Bible told us that humanity is a special creation, apart from the rest of the world, that shall have dominion over all the Earth. That implied the Earth and its resources were there for human "progress." Unfortunately, the Bible said little about our responsibility to the Earth, its other denizens, and future generations. As a result, our natural tendency to explosive population growth has been encouraged until we now live in an overcrowded, malnourished, and diseased world. (It would, however, be a gross oversimplification to lay all our environmental ills to these roots.)

More subtle examples of how biology affects human thought can be found in the more recent history of the science. At the time of the Renaissance, people were rediscovering discovery and invention. Rising out of the Dark Ages, they were learning that many ideas accepted for generations were wrong and that new ideas and things could be made. As a result, the old view that life is due to the investment of matter with some "vital spark" or "animat-

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ing principle," the view called vitalism, was attacked by those who believed in mechanism, the view that life is inherent in matter, a function of the arrangement of chemical parts. It took these attackers until the mid-nineteenth century to win the battle completely, when Pasteur finally scotched the theory of spontaneous generation, but today their mechanistic view is almost universally held. Life is seen as a property of physical systems, a consequence of chemical complexity. Living things are mechanisms, chemical machines—extremely subtle and complex ones, but nevertheless machines.

Mechanism by itself has contributed to the demystification of the world, the fading of superstition, the killing of God, if you will. It has led us to believe that we can tinker with the living world, constantly "improving" it, just as we do with our concoctions of gears and engines. Only recently has the growth of information science and the popularization of the ideas of feedback and control networks let awe and wonder be reborn by revealing the complexity of living machines, a complexity that tinkering must often spoil.

But the major effect of mechanism on human thought comes from an offshoot of the battle between vitalists and mechanists. Darwin's demonstration that the life forms of Earth do not owe their origins to the hand of God, but instead to the inexorable workings of random fate, to chance variation and natural selection of those variations more fit to survive, had a great deal to do with shifting the focus of Christianity to a more ehtical and spiritual stance. It also shaped politics, for the idea of "survival of the fittest" has been used by white supremacists to justify racism, by Nazis to justify genocide, and by "social Darwinists" to justify withholding aid (welfare) from society's "failures," the poor. And the idea of evolutionary progress—supposedly toward some ideal of perfection—has supported the idea of material progress. It is in no small part responsible for the wealth of knowledge and goods we enjoy today.

It is worth noting that the theory of evolution by natural selection arose during the industrial revolution. The minds of Darwin and his fellows were prepared by a sense of change and progression in human life to recognize and accept similar change and progression in the natural world. Darwin's ideas then blessed human progress as natural, instead of only desirable and convenient, which gave the industrial revolution that extra bit of momentum, that supposed validity, which today makes it so hard to bring under control.

We can say that biology acts to shape human thought and society by providing models of the world—patterns of thought, or paradigms—whose influence is strong because they are drawn from the living world and because they reflect trends and events in human history. They therefore have a ring of truth, and they are easy to accept.

The modern world is in a sense an expression of the paradigms of mechanism and evolution. It believes that the universe is basically understandable, that there are no supernatural causes, and that success is its own excuse. It is sure that it is geting better and better all the time, that it is progressing toward some utopian vision, and that its progress is proper and desirable. Unfortunately, our ideas of progress have somehow become confused with ideas of growth to the extent that we all too often equate progress with growth in economics, growth in technology (at almost any cost), and in some parts of the world with growth in population. And growth literally *cannot* go on forever. We can prove this quite easily by taking a single ridiculous example: If the world's human population (4.5 billion people) continues to grow at its present rate of about 2 percent per year, its combined mass (now 338 million tons) will exceed the mass of the Earth (about 6.5 billion trillion tons) in about 1550 years and the mass of the entire solar system in about 2200 years. Such growth must inevitably mean the destruction of the rest of the world, its conversion to serve human needs, and a greater vulnerability of the human species to natural disaster. But it is not an easy thing to stop. Even though population growth is slowing now, relatively few people question the desirability of economic and technological growth, which depend just as much on material resources as population growth.

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Along with growth, we have become materialistic. Even though this is a part of the utopian dream, to have ever more conveniences and luxuries, it does not in itself necessarily lead to improvement in the quality of life. There is a price to materialism. Our comforts have given us a world of crowded cities, pollution, and dwindling resources, a world whose balance of political power is therefore shifting from the resource-consuming industrial nations to the resource-supplying underdeveloped nations, a world whose activities threaten climate change, cancer, and many other ills. It is a world in which human survival is paradoxically threatened.

Fortunately, the very problems resulting from the success of mechanism and evolution as paradigms may be giving rise to two new paradigms, and here we return to where this article began. These two new paradigms are the sources of reflections—pick the term you prefer—of two paths into the future. One sees evolution not as continual progress, but as progress toward a steady state, a balance of nature. It points out that in the remote past humans were in as perfect an equilibrium with their predators, their food supplies, and the few resources they exploited as any other living thing. They were not numerous, and they were not terribly well off, but their style of life was such that it could last virtually unchanged forever. This changed with the discovery of agriculture, metals, machines, and medicines, until our style of life as it exists today can last unchanged for little more than another generation. A new permanence requires a new balance. If it is ever achieved, the human population will be much smaller than it is today, and it will use only those amounts of food, energy, and materials that become available with the yearly input of sunlight and with eons-long geological processes (conservation and recycling will therefore be facts of life).

This paradigm is the pattern of thought we call ecology. This relatively new branch of biology—first named less than a century ago—treats the world as a "system." The ecologist sees the world as a balance which can be disrupted all too easily by human activities or by natural catastrophe. He does not deny, however, that it also has a remarkable resiliency. The disrupted system is never truly destroyed. It restores itself, though usually in a different form. If a forest burns, it is replaced by field. If farmland is abused, it becomes desert. "Before" and "after" are both ecologically balanced; the difference lies largely in the value to humans.

The ecologist tells us that we cannot abuse our environment without making it less attractive, desirable, and useful. And his knowledge and attitudes are spreading into society at large. The people of the industrialized nations are realizing that endless growth is neither possible nor good and that a steady-state society, one that exists in balance with the rest of the world, must somehow be achieved. It need *not* be the kind of stagnant "no-growth" society many people fear. It can remain vital as long as each instance of growth in one sector of human activity is matched by a compensating decline in some other sector, as long as more automobiles must mean fewer refrigerators, more lumber must mean less paper, more Frenchmen must mean fewer Chinese, and so on.

The idea of the steady state has been thoroughly publicized in recent years. One concept, stemming from NASA's first photos of Earth as a small blue marble hanging in space, has been the view of our planet as Spaceship Earth—a tiny, life-bearing vessel in which air, food, and materials are continually recycled and all energy is derived from the sun. Manufactured spaceships are extremely vulnerable to contamination, destruction, and failures of maintenance; they are more vulnerable than the Earth only because of their small size, however. They contain less diversity and stability and fewer interactional checks and balances of the kinds that correct ecological disturbances on Earth. But the difference is one of scale, not kind, and the Earth is also finite and vulnerable to abuse. It requires as careful maintenance as any spaceship built by human hands. If that maintenance fails, the craft will no longer support life. And the maintenance is failing—we have overloaded Spaceship Earth's life support systems with our numbers and our poisons, and we have cannibalized its parts to build toys.

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The signs of Spaceship Earth's failure are slight so far, because our planet is so large and complex that it takes a long time to run down. By the same token, we still have time to reverse the damage and restore its ability to maintain life for eons to come. We are beginning to do so, but we have a long way yet to go. Technology can help by giving us ways to undo and prevent damage to the Earth. Recycling of materials and returning organic wastes to the land as fertilizer can also help. But we can do the greatest good by reducing our numbers to a level that will let the world's natural processes maintain the steady state despite us.

If we folow this path as fully as some people would have us do, and make it work, the future will almost certainly be something like the following: There will be fewer people, and their impact on the world around them will be less. They will be less interested in wealth and economic growth, and the economics of the future will be built around the concept of sufficiency, not the quest for luxury. Individuals will strive only for enough money to live healthily and comfortably, to pay for medical care, a roof, clothing, a balanced diet, and perhaps a fishing rod, but not for today's luxury goods (such as CB radios and snowmobiles). Businesses will aim at providing a stable job supply rather than at providing returns on investment for stockholders; they may be government owned or modeled on present-day nonprofit operations. Life will be stable and change will be slow (much as was the case through most of human history); life will also seem simple, unaggressive, and unexciting compared to today's standards, but it will be less stressful, too, and scholarship may offer enough excitement for those who crave it, just as it does for many today.

The results of the ecological paradigm represent a turning inward, an increasing reliance on each individual's own personal resources to compensate for the loss of external resources. It may therefore lack appeal to many people today (though it might appeal to their descendants, who will have been raised in a different environment of ideas and will hold different expectations of life). But it is not the only possible future. There is that other I have mentioned, an outgrowth of another paradigm, that represents a turning outward and a continuation of many aspects of modern life.

This second paradigm grows out of studies of the evolution of life on Earth and the observation that when life invades a new environment—as when it moved from the sea onto the land—it undergoes an "adaptive radiation." When life first left the sea, half a billion years ago, it adapted to the marginal zone along the shore. It evolved an ability to withstand drying, first for short periods of time, then for longer ones. It moved from the zone in which it was exposed to air only at low tide to the zone in which it was covered by water only at high tide. As it slowly became independent of the sea, it moved up the beaches and onto the continents, where it found thousands of ways to make a living that did not exist in the sea. Each life form that reached the land then gave rise to many more, each one adapted to exploit one of these new ways of life, and within a few million years the land was covered with plants and animals that no longer needed the sea even as an occasional shelter or nursery. The number of kinds of living things was vastly increased.

A similar adaptation and radiation happened when the first finches reached the Galapagos Islands. Their descendents quickly evolved to take advantage of the newly available and previously unexploited ways of life. Some retained the ancestral seed-eating habit. Others took to eating fruits and bugs, and even to using a twig to winkle bugs out of cracks in bark (this last is the famous woodpecker finch; it lacks a woodpecker's chisel-like beak, but it uses a tool to exploit the woodpecker's way of life). Some lived in the forests. Others took to living in jungle or desert. By the time Charles Darwin reached the Galapagos, there were fourteen distinct species of finch, all of them descended from a single parent species. Their existence helped lead Darwin to his famous theory by demonstrating the appearance of new species by evolution. But it also illustrates the opportunism of living things—they will evolve to take advantage of every new opportunity

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that presents itself; if several opportunities are before a single species, and there are no other species competing for them, that species will give rise to several new ones, each one specialized to exploit one opportunity.

What does all this have to do with the human future? Very simply, a new environment, with a host of new ways to live, is now open to us for the first time. This environment is space, and according to the adaptive-radiation paradigm, we are bound to take advantage of it, to move into space at first bit by bit, constantly returning to Earth or some other planetary base, and then for good, perhaps living only in huge spaceships that continually cruise the void. We might even, eventually, evolve into new species, different varieties of *Homo galacticus*, each exploiting a different feature or part of the new environment. The ultimate variety is suggested by a look at the wealth of life styles we can see in the living world on Earth. Think of the land as space, the sea as planets, and think of fishermen, pirates, and traders, of plants, herbivores, and carnivores, of farmers and miners and parasites. Think of adaptive radiation over millions of years, and think of new species of humanity spread across the universe.

We have already taken the first steps by putting men into orbit and on the moon. The next step is space stations, O'Neill colonies, and manned trips to the other planets in our solar system. In the process, we would build solar power satellites, beaming microwaves down the Earth for conversion to electricity, and mine metals and other scarce materials from the moon and asteroids. We might thereby make possible a society on Earth that is not limited by energy and materials. We might even make it possible for growth to continue until everyone on Earth enjoys an equal and high standard of living. If, as we move into space, we spread to other stars, we might even make it possible for the total mass of humanity to someday exceed the mass of the Earth or the solar system.

The trouble is that the path to space will be open to us for little more than another century, if that. It requires vast resources of money, energy, and materials, resources that we have now but will not have if we let them be sidetracked to more Earthbound concerns. If we wait too long, the necessary resources will all have been used for other purposes, and the path to space will be forever closed.

Unfortunately, while picturing humanity in space is the more optimistic of my two visions of the future, it is not necessarily the more likely. The benefits of space research and space exploration are questioned by many people. They point to the problems of social and racial inequity, environmental damage, unemployment, scarcity, and maldistribution here on Earth and argue that the money and resources needed for space would be much better devoted to these. Because of such sentiments, NASA's small budget has been shrinking since before the end of the Apollo program in the late 1960s.

Space research has paid off handsomely in terms of communications satellites, resource surveys, and improved navigation, among other things. Its benefits have exceeded its costs many times over the years, and they can be expected to continue to do so. But the movement to space—a long-term solution to many problems—is likely to be stifled in the search for short-term solutions. We are not likely to have space colonies in the near future, and we may never have them at all. The path toward a low-key, steady-state, no-growth, unaggressive life is the one we are more likely to travel. And we are not going to enter that path easily; short-term solutions generally fail. We may well first experience a general collapse of our civilization, a new Dark Age. When and if civilization finally returns, we will have no choice but to remain on Earth, limited by our lack of the nonrenewable resources we used up years before.

The path to space therefore seems the less painful, more fruitful, and more promising of the two. Even if our species could achieve the steady state without disaster, even if it could make the transition smoothly and deliberately—something many people are now striving to ensure—it might not find satisfaction there for long. Our sense of accomplishment, excitement, and destiny may be fulfillable only in space. And if we fail to reach out for this future, to pursue our biological destiny, we will have perverted our nature. ●

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Games fen will Play

by Greg Costikyan

This column deals with the Micro/Capsule games — small science fiction and fantasy games selling for $3 - $6. Next issue's column will deal with the sf & f games of Game Designers' Workshop.

ANNIHILATOR/ONE-WORLD, ($2.95), James E. Tucker/W. G. Armintrout, Metagaming, Box 15346, Austin, TX, 78761;

ASTEROID ZERO-FOUR, ($3.95), Stephen Cole, Task Force Games, 405 Skouth Crockett, Amarillo, TX 79106;

BLACK HOLE, ($2.95), Robert Taylor, Metagaming;

CHITIN: I, ($2.95), Howard Thompson, Metagaming;

CERBERUS, ($3.95), Stephen Cole, Task Force Games;

THE CREATURE THAT ATE SHEBOYGAN, ($3.95 or $5.95 boxed), Greg Costikyan, Simulations Publications, Inc. (SPI), 257 Park Ave. South, New York, NY 10010;

DEATH TEST, ($2.95), Steve Jackson, Metagaming;

DEATHMAZE, ($3.95 or $5.95 boxed), Greg Costikyan, SPI;

DEMONS, ($3.95 or $5.95 boxed), Jim Dunnigan, SPI;

HOLY WAR, ($2.95), Lynn Willis, Metagaming;

HOT SPOT, ($2.95), W.G. Armintrout, Metagaming;

INVASION OF THE AIR-EATERS, ($2.95), Keith Gross, Metagaming;

THE LEGEND OF ROBIN HOOD, ($3.95), Joe Bisio, Operational Studies Group, 1261 Broadway, New York, NY 10001;

MELEE, ($2.95), Steve Jackson, Metagaming;

OGRE, ($2.95), Steve Jackson, Metagaming;

RIVETS, ($2.95), Robert Taylor, Metagaming;

STARFIRE, ($3.95), Stephen Cole, Task Force Games;

STAR FLEET BATTLES, ($4.95), Stephen Cole, Task Force Games;

STARGATE, ($3.95), John Butterfield, SPI;

STAR QUEST, ($3.95), Ed Curran, Operational Studies Group;

STOMP! ($2.95), Tadashi Ehara, The Chaosium, Box 6302, Albany, CA 94706;

SWORDQUEST, ($4.95), R. Vance Buck, Task Force Games;

TITAN STRIKE, ($3.95), Phil Kosnett, SPI;

VALKENBURG CASTLE, ($3.95), Stephen Cole, Task Force Games;

VECTOR 3, ($3.95), Greg Costikyan/Tom Gould, SPI;

WARP WAR, ($2.95), Howard Thompson, Megagaming;

WIZARD, ($3.95), Steve Jackson, Metagaming;

WORLDKILLER, ($5.95 boxed), Redmond Simonsen, SPI.

IN 1972, SIMULATIONS Publications (SPI) started publishing what it called "Quadrigames"—packs of four games in a single box, each game having 2000-4000 words of rules, 100 counters, and a game-map about half the size of a normal SPI game. The four games in a Quadrigame used the same game-system to simulate four different battles, usually taken from the same period—World War II, Napoleonic, or Civil War. Each Quad game was also sold separately in a cardboard folder for about $4 (later raised to $5). The first few Quad games were quite successful; but SPI, as is sometimes its wont, grew sloppy, and later Quad games were of lower quality than the first few—and did not receive the same attention as SPI's larger games. Eventually, SPI discontinued the format. Every once in a while, they

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will publish another Quad game, but not with the frequency of the early years.

In 1977, Metagaming Concepts, a small company with two successful games, was looking for a way to expand cheaply. They hit upon the concept of the Microgame. The idea was obviously derivative of the Quad games, but the apporach was slightly different—and a great deal more care and attention was lavished on Metagaming's Micros than SPI had given to the later Quads. Largely as a result of the qualty of Metagaming's early Micros, they were an instant success, and Metagaming is now the fourth or fifth (depending on whose figures you believe) largest company in the hobby gaming field.

As Metagaming's two major designers—Steve Jackson and Howard Thompson—turned more and more to the business of running their company and publishing its flagship magazine, *THE SPACE GAMER* Metagaming increasingly turned to outside designers to design their Micros. The result is that their more recent products are considerably less exciting than their first few games. Occasionally they publish an excellent game, and one hopes that, as Metagaming's reorganization is completed, they will get back to focussing on the Micros. They have been attracting some good designers lately, but it remains to be seen whether the quality of future games will match that of the first few.

In 1978, SPI, the hobby's second largest publisher, learned that Metagaming's first Micro, OGRE, had sold more than 10,000 units in its first year. Never being one to pass up a profit-making opportunity, SPI immediately began to publish its Capsule game series. Situated in New York, SPI has always had access to the largest and highest quality pool of designers in the country (it is estimated that one-quarter of all the gamers in the country live in the New York metropolitan area.) Also, SPI had a great deal of expertise and experience, both at designing and publishing small games and science fiction and fantasy games. SPI's first group of games was a mixed batch; some excellent, some rather poor. Their graphics and the production quality of their components were considerably superior to that of Metagaming's, but that's why Metagaming's Micros are priced at $2.95, and SPI's Capsules at $3.95. SPI has recently started publishing a SF & F gaming magazine called *ARES* which will contain a Capsule game in each issue, and they are firmly committed to the continued production of Capsules. It remains to be seen whether SPI's Capsules will remain of generally high quality—or whether that quality will gradually decline, as did the quality of the Quad games. There is a drawback in their inflexible payment arrangements, whereby a designer is paid a flat fee for a Capsule game, regardless of his experience or the quality of his designs—as compared to Metagaming, which makes increasing payments to designers depending on the number of games they have designed in the past.

Stephen V. Cole, founder of Task Force Games, is a well-known figure in the gaming field. For many years, he edited the field's leading independent magazine, and in 1978, he decided to start a company of his own. With an eye to the success of the Micros, he produced four science fiction micros, releasing them at Origins in 1978 (the premier national gaming convention). I have no figures on the success of Task Force Games, but they seem to be doing well, having published several games since that time, including several boxed games.

Task Force is a hard company to understand. Their games are almost uniformly mediocre, the graphics being sloppy at best. A special drawback (at least for those of taste) are the awful covers on all of Task Force's SF & F micros, all executed by A.J. Belflower, a man addicted to hallucinogenic colors and the airbrush.

A number of other companies have also published games in the Micro/Capsule format: these include Operational Studies Group, another New York company; and the Chaosium, the publisher of some of the most innovative and exciting fantasy games.

The first Microgame was OGRE, loosely based on Kieth Laumer's Bolo series—a single, sapient giant tank (whose firepower is measured in kilotons per second) facing a horde of lesser tanks and armored infantry. OGRE's success, I think, is largely due to its successful mating of two of gaming's most popular subjects—science fic-

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tion and the tank. This should not be taken as belittling the game, however, because OGRE is tense, fast-playing and a close match right down to the last die-roll. One of the comments frequently heard when it first came out was an expression of surprise that the game was of such high quality despite its small size and low cost; a lot of "bang for your buck".

The second Micro was CHITIN I, dealing with the "Harvest Wars" between rival hives of intelligent insects desperately fighting for limited foodstuffs. Though the concept was rather interesting, CHITIN was something of a disappointment after OGRE. Not a *bad* game, but it didn't live up to expectations.

The third Micro was MELEE, and the sixth was WIZARD. They and DEATH TEST (published as "MicroQuest 1") should be mentioned together; all three use aspects of Steven Jackson's THE FANTASY TRIP system. THE FANTASY TRIP, when completed, will be a full-scale role-playing game (the first volume of which, IN THE LABYRINTH, has recently been issued by Metagaming). MELEE is TFT's combat system; characters are matched against each other and monsters in an arena. WIZARD is TFT's magic system; mages are matched against each other, fighters, and monsters in magical combat. DEATH TEST is a solitaire dungeon to be used with the MELEE and WIZARD rules. The TFT system is clean, easily assimilated, and quite realistic for a system of such limited complexity. Both games (as well as the adventure) are highly enjoyable. If CHITIN did not meet expectations, MELEE recouped Metagaming's reputation.

WARP WAR, a strategic/operation interstellar combat game, was rather mundane. Movement was by a "Mote in God's Eye" point-to-point "Warpline" system, and combat was resolved in an extended and rather boring tactical system. The limited area of the game-map did not allow for sufficient strategic flexibility, and games became stereotyped after a few playings. The one interesting feature was the freedom given the players to design their own ships.

RIVETS got generally negative reactions when it came out, but has always been one of my personal favorites. The

Boppers are cheap versions of the OGRE, designed with Latin American dictators and similar militarists with limited budgets in mind. There are six different types of Boppers, each with slightly different capabilities; because of the limited intellects of the robot tanks, each type may only be programmed to attack one other type. The result is a number of units wandering around the board and ignoring each other, being unable to attack the wrong foe. It was a cute game.

We now come to a hiatus. I didn't purchase Micros 7 through 9 and 11, because none looked interesting, and Metagaming didn't bother to respond to my request for review copies (this is known as good public relations). Consequently, we pick up again with number 10, BLACK HOLE. BLACK HOLE is a game with one (and only one) interesting feature; the game-map depicts a toroidal-shaped asteroid (like a donut) in a quite realistic manner, something I wouldn't have thought possible. The rationale is that the center of the toroid is occupied by a black hole, and two asteroid mining companies are fighting over control of the thing. Other than this, the game is a pretty standard land-combat game, with a few interesting twists.

With INVASION OF THE AIR EATERS, Metagaming got sloppy. INVASION has the potential to be an interesting game, and its basic quality

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shines through the muck it's set in. The most important problem is that the game seems to be unbalanced; I've yet to see the Terran player win. There are also some problems with the rules and graphics—the map, for instance, covers the entire world, but the long axis is the North-South axis-which makes for some oddly shaped landmasses. INVASION OF THE AIR EATERS deals with an invasion of Earth by a group of aliens who immediately set about converting our air into something more breathable—for them.

HOLY WAR also evidences sloppy development work, despite a solid design by Lynn Willis. The setting is an unusual one; an intelligent, 40,000 km-long being creates a pocket universe 30 light years in diameter in order to conduct some experiments. Life evolves in a mini-universe, as do two religious sects; the Sunthrowers, who believe that "life is not an end, but a by-product of systems design" and seek to destroy the being by throwing suns at his sensors; and the Holy Band, who seek to protect him. The result is an interstellar war of unusual scope. The movement system is a "warpline" one (ala WARP WAR), but the map is three-dimensional (or rather, portrays three diminsions). The problem is that the rules are rather obscurely written and difficult to learn completely and quickly; and that changes made by Metagaming from Willis' original design completely unbalance the game. HOLY WAR must by considered an interesting failure.

ANNIHILATOR/ONE-WORLD is two separate games in a single packet. ANNIHILATOR deals with an attack by a human team into a Berserker-like spaceship; the team is attempting to nullify the ship. The game is simplistic and uninteresting; a "publisher's note" says it is designed mostly for the novice player, but I don't think Metagaming should have bothered. ONE-WORLD has received mostly negative reviews; true, it is only mildly interesting to play, but its system and premise are more than a little amusing. The game pits two gods against each other across a surrealistic landscape. Neither god may move ("They could if they wanted to, but neither wants to."); instead, they send their "Children" across the board—shape-changers who can choose any of three forms: Blade, Fog, and Stone. The combat system is—I'm not kidding—Paper, Scissors, Rock. Amusing—but not worth $2.95. What's gotten into Metagaming, anyway?

Metagaming's latest game, HOT SPOT, shows that all hope for Metagaming is not lost; they're still capable of producing excellent work. HOT SPOT deals with a planet in the final stages of differentiation; the crust consists of molten lava. The planet is also a major fuel depot, run by Ziegler Corporation from specially designed "crustals"—platforms that can survive on the surface of the planet, and from which all operations are based. The remnants of the Technocrat fleet desperately need fuel—their last chance is to set down on the planet, capture the crustals, and take it. They have a few attack platforms which can survive for up to two hours on the surface; by that time, they must have captured at least one of the crustals. The most interesting facet of the game is the necessity for the units to remain on the crustals or attack platforms—which are capable of moving, slowly, across the surface of the planet. Thus, the strategic aspects of the game are channeled and determined by the positions of the platforms. HOT SPOT is well worth getting.

We now come to SPI's Capsule games. A conflict of interest presents itself; three of the seven SF & F Capsules printed to date are my design—and I cannot in all honesty write impartial reviews of them. Neither can I, in all modesty, leave them unmentioned. Consequently, I shall mention them briefly: THE CREATURE THAT ATE SHEBOYGAN deals with the attempt by a monster to make lunch of a Mid-American city, and the attempts by the police and National Guard to stop it; VECTOR 3 is a tactical space combat game using the BATTLEFLEET MARS system; and DEATHMAZE is a solitaire randomly-generated dungeon in which the structure of corridors and rooms is built up during play.

TITAN STRIKE and STAR GATE were published simultaneously with CREATURE and VECTOR 3. TITAN STRIKE deals with a conflict between Europe and Asia fought over valuable uranium

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deposits on Titan, a moon of Saturn. Despite some interesting electronic counter-measure rules, TITAN STRIKE is little more than a modern land-combat game transported into space; disappointing.

STAR GATE is somewhat more interesting. It deals with a battle between a race of xenophobes who build three different types of ships that, when linked up, turn into a super dread nought; and an alliance of four other races (including humans), each of whose ships have different characteristics. STAR GATE is very chess-like, in that each ship moves in a particular manner. Not a bad little game, on the whole.

DEMONS is a game about magical conflict among powerful wizards in Medieval Armenia. (Why Armenia? Why not?) The designer claims to have done extensive "historical research" for this fantasy game—reading Medieval grimoires and occult works. The players work less against each other than against the outraged locals, who want no truck with those who have dealings with Satan. The wizards manage by summoning demons to perform their will. DEMONS, however, is too simple to hold the players' interest beyond the first couple of games. Another interesting failure.

WORLDKILLER was the game published in *ARES* magazine's first issue. One would have thought that SPI would seek to make a good impression by producing a high quality game in the first issue. On the contrary, WORLDKILLER is a dog. The map portrays three dimensions using a development of Lynn Willis' 3-D system. One player controls forces attempting to clear the space around a planet preparatory to conquest; the other player takes the defenders. The game is simple and uninteresting, with no complications introduced to hold one's interest.

Task Force's STAR FLEET BATTLES and STARFIRE use a similar system—both are tactical space combat games. STAR FLEET is based on Star Trek, and is the superior game. It is quite complicated, especially for a micro, with 28 densely-set pages of rules. Every conceivable race has a ship in the game; humans, Kzin, Klingons, Romulans, and Gorns. The system, in many respects, is a development of Lou Zocchi's ALIEN SPACE, but considerably superior to that system. Unfortunately, it seems that Task Force is no longer selling it as a micro, but as a boxed game for $13. It's still worth looking at, especially if you are a Trek fan.

STARFIRE is a considerably simpler game, and should be considered a subset of STAR FLEET. Though not terribly imaginative, it is not a bad game.

ASTEROID ZERO-FOUR is a carrier game transported into space. Each player's forces are based on an asteroid (read air-craft carrier), and he must mount an attack on the other's base with spaceships (read aircraft) and missiles. The game plays quite well, with quite a number of strategic options for both players, and often being closely-fought to the end; the development work was obviously well-done. If there is a fault, it lies in the lack of innovative design: the premise seems an attempt to rationalize using a carrier system for space combat. Thus, the premise comes after the fact, rather than being the basis for the design of the game. This, in fact, seems to be Task Force 's usual problem; a lack of imagination.

Similarly, CERBERUS is little more than a ground combat game transported into the future. Its map portrays an entire planet using a "orange-peel" projection. The rules are quite detailed, covering air combat, supply, and (in the most interesting facet of the game) weather. Regardless of the undeniable competence of the execution, one is less than enthusiastic with the flavor of the game. If one wishes to play a conventional land combat game, there are dozens on the market.

SWORDQUEST reaffirms the feeling that Task Force has a definite paucity of imagination. It is a quest game, in which both (or, in the three-player game, all three) players seek to find and hold a magical sword. When a group of characters meet in combat, they organize themselves into a "Telshir"—a rigid line of five men. When one man retires from his line, another may take his place—but no maneuver is possible. The system is obviously designed so that a more complicated tactical combat system can be avoided—there is only so much room in a micro, after all. In order to justify the system, the

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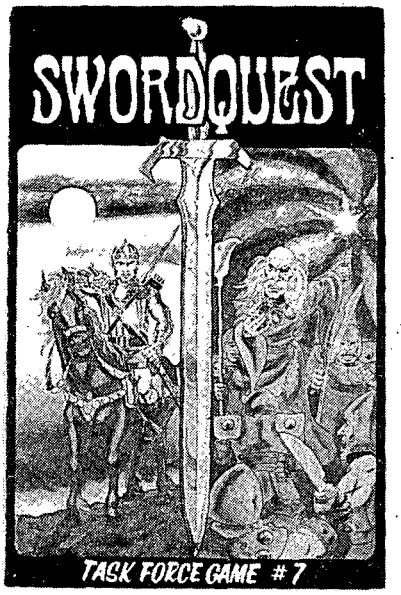

designer includes a transparent explanation that organization into Telshirs is part of the code of honor of fighting men on his world—apparently, a code which even the Evil player must adhere to.

VALKENBURG CASTLE is a dungeon. The players represent parties who enter the castle in order to fight monsters and take their treasure. A breathtakingly original concept, yes? Again, Task Force demonstrates its immense collective imagination by putting D & D on a game-map.

Operational Studies Group makes much play about their commitment to quality in their magazine; they deride the money-grubbing atmosphere of Avalon-Hill and the time pressures at SPI; they talk of the "art" of game design in existential terms. (If you think I'm joking, write OSG for their magazine). It is curious that, of the two micros published by OSG, one is a dog, and the other mediocre.

STAR QUEST is a tactical space combat game. In the center of the game-map is a star, which exerts gravitational forces on ships in the game. Ships fight by firing missiles at each other. They may use "hyperspace" movement, in which case their new position on the board is determined randomly—if this is beginning to sound like a noted video space game, there's no cooincidence. STAR QUEST is the Space Wars video game, put in board-game format; the differences are rather minimal. Save your $4; 16 quarters will get you a good number of minutes on the Space Wars machine at your local pinball parlor, and your time will be better spent.

The map of THE LEGEND OF ROBIN HOOD depicts Sherwood Forest and the surrounding area. At the beginning of the game, most of Robin's followers are not activated; he must go around and recruit them. The Sheriff and followers attempt to capture, try, and hang Robin. Robin must either marry Maid Marion and stay out of the clutches of the law until the end of the game, or get himself pardoned by King Richard, or just rob enough travellers to win. ROBIN HOOD seems to contain most of the elements of the legend—but play drags a bit.

The Chaosium's STOMP! is one of the most amusing micros on the market. "Once more the foraging elves invaded the sorcerer's garden, shouting, carousing, leaving watermelon rinds, and angering the usually temperate Lord Darn. He ordered his watch-giant, Thunderpumper, to clear the area of elves . . ." and so Thunderpumper does. Thunderpumper is represented by two double-sized Foot counters and a Club counter—and he attacks the elves primarily by attempting to step on them. The elves retaliate by trying to pin the giant's sandals to the ground with spears, then pull him down with ropes and run away. STOMP! is highly recommended.

Gamers generally think of companies before they think of designers. There are many gamers who swear by, say, Metagaming, but few who religiously purchase everything Steve Jackson publishes. This is unfortunate, for the designer usually has more to do with the quality of a game than the publisher.

Steve Jackson is definitely a micro designer to look for. As designer of OGRE, MELEE, and WIZARD, he is responsible for most of Metagaming's best games. Stephen Cole has designed most of Task Force's games and to him, I think, can be laid both their competent execution and lack of imagination. Robert Taylor, of

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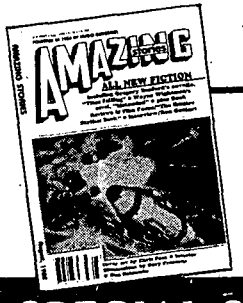
RIVETS and BLACK HOLE, does not have a terribly good record. Howard Thompson, of CHITIN and WARP WAR, too, seems competent but not brilliant. Others have not published a sufficient number of micros to judge.

As the number of micros continues to expand and as Metagaming, SPI, Task Force and others continue to flood the market, it remains to be seen whether this expansion will produce a decline in quality or whether a few excellent micro-games will continue to be published. ●



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by Walter B. Hendrickson, Jr.

LIKE EARTH-SIDE clothing, the new space suits that will be worn by our Space Shuttle astronauts will come in five sizes. This is a departure from previous space suits which were tailor-made for each astronaut.

In addition, the suit comes in separate parts so that the astronauts can select the proper components to fit a variety of sizes and shapes. There will be considerable variety in shapes among the Space Shuttle astronauts too, as some of them are women.

"The space suit is sized with components so that 90 per cent of the male/female crew members will be able to be accommodated with the suit," says a NASA data sheet on the subject. "The suit consists of the hard upper torso, gloves, the lower torso, helmet and the extravehicular activity visor assembly, which fits over the helmet. The lower torso is available in two sizes and consists of a waist ring attached to the leg-boots. The upper torso is made in four sizes with a matching hard waist ring. Connecting gloves are available in nine sizes. There is only one size helmet."

These off the rack space suits represent a considerable time and money saving over the old custom-tailored models used on previous space programs. At the present, the money saving aspects of the new space suits are the most important for the space agency which has been running on a tight budget ever since the first moon landing. For astronauts, however, off the rack space suits will provide more time to concentrate on the mission and less time in the space suit fitting room.

Unlike earlier American spaceships, the Space Shuttle has an atmosphere of oxygen and nitrogen at sea level pressure. This eliminates the need for pre-breathing oxygen that was required on earlier spacecraft that had pure oxygen atmospheres at low pressure. Also, the Space Shuttle has an airlock for extravehicular activity (EVA), or space walks as they are popularly known. This means that the

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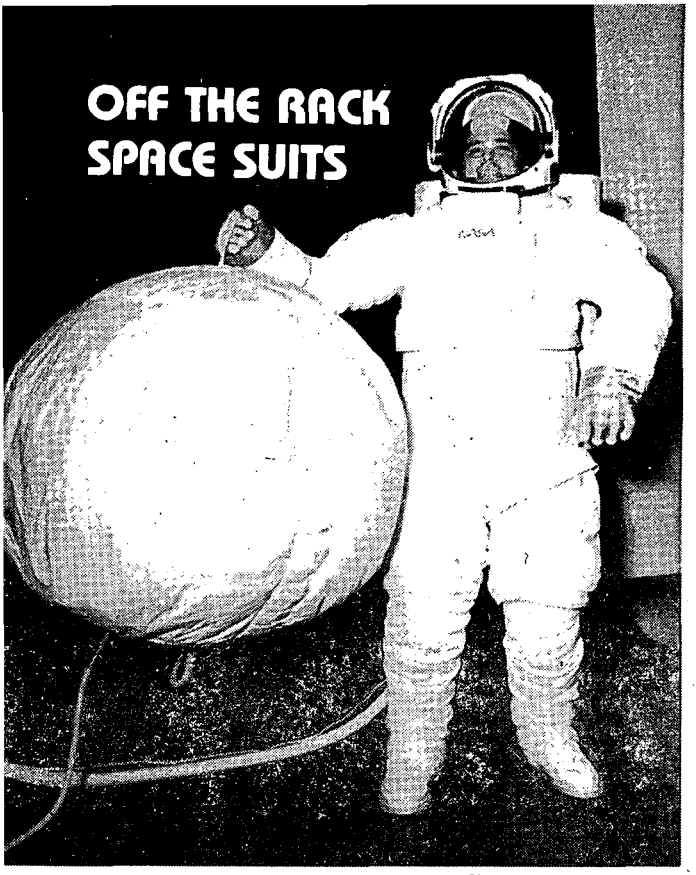
OFF THE RACK SPACE SUITS



Robert K. Williams shown with 34-inch personal rescue enclosure proposed for the space shuttle. He is wearing a Johnson Space Center designed shuttle spacesuit with mid-torso ring closure instead of pressure sealing zippers of earlier suits.

Photos courtesy of NASA

Space Shuttle astronauts will only need space suits when they are going for a space walk, and then only the ones performing the EVA will need them.

This will be a great relief to the astronauts who frequently dislike the confinement of a space suit. In his book, *Carrying the Fire*, Astronaut Michael Collins expresses some of these feelings: "One doesn't really wear a pressure suit, one gets inside it. Once gloves and helmet are locked in place and the suit is pressurized, you peer out at the world but are not part of it; you are trapped inside this rigid cocoon, as dependent on it as any chrysalis, dependent especially for an abundant flow of air or oxygen to breathe and to provide a cooling flow over the body."

It took Mike Collins some time to get accustomed to working in his Gemini space suit, numbered G-4C-36. However, he eventually became so accustomed to it that he said in his book, "For G-4C-36 I felt as close to love as one can feel for metal, fabric, and rubber; but when I think generically of pressure suits, I think, ugh, nasty little coffins. I'd be pleased never to get inside one again."

Of course, even a Space Shuttle astronaut must get into a space suit when he, or she, prepares for an EVA. The first step in this process is to don the suit's liquid cooling and vent garment (LCVG). This is a kind of space-age adult Dr. Denims complete with feet and fingerless gloves. It has tubing which circulates cooling water to remove excess body heat from the astronaut. This garment is connected to the space suit's Primary Life

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Support Subsystem (PLSS) in the backpack where the heat is actually removed.

For long EVA's an astronaut must wear a Urine Collecting Device (UCD) which, of course, comes in either female or male versions, under the cooling garment. A .95 Liter In-Suit Drinking Bag (IDB) holds potable water to replace that lost during EVA. Communications are provided by the familiar "Snoopy cap" which the NASA engineers call a Communications Carrier Assembly (CCA), and a Biomedical Instrumentation Subsystem (BIS) which monitors the astronauts' vital signs such as heart rate, respiration and pulse.

Now, the astronaut is ready to get into the space suit itself. This suit is made of multiple layers bonded together starting with a polyurethane-on-nylon pressure bladder then several layers of kevler tucked and folded at the joints, and finally an outer layer of kevler, teflon, and a dacron anti-abrasive layer. In addition, the upper torso has a hard aluminum shell much like the breast and back plates of 15th century armor. All these layers make an air-tight suit that could not be punctured even by a meteorite or jagged sliver of metal.

Just as in donning street clothing, the astronaut first puts on the lower half of the space suit. Then he, or she, literally climbs into the upper half of the suit which hangs on a rack, called an adaptor plate, by the space shuttle's airlock. The halves of the suit are then sealed together by a ring around the waist similar to that which is now used to seal the helmet in place.

A light emitting diode display in front of the astronaut now tells him that the supplies of cooling water and oxygen are flowing properly from the space suit's built-in backpack. As well as providing a flow of cooling water to the astronaut's LCVC, the backpack's Primary Life Support Subsystem (PLSS) removes carbon dioxide from the suit's air supply, and supplies new oxygen for breathing.

These operations are regulated by a microprocessor, much like that in a pocket calculator. It reports to the astronaut how things are functioning, and warns him, or her, if anythng goes wrong. An alarm is also given thirty minutes before the astronaut's six hour EVA time is up. The microprocessor and the space suit's radio, which is also contained in the .5 meter deep, .58 meter wide, and .77 meter high backpack, are powered by rechargeable, silver-zinc batteries. These batteries provide 17 volts at 52 watts for up to seven hours on a charge.

Altogether, the completed Space Shuttle space suit appears somewhat more bulky than those worn on the Apollo program. Yet it is much lighter, and allows more freedom of movement. The suit itself weighs 25.85 kilograms, and its backpack weighs 19.76 kilograms for a total of 45.61 kilograms. By comparison, the Apollo space suit weighed 81.65 kilograms, and its separate backpack 34.02 kilograms for a total of 115.67 kilograms making it 70.06 kilograms heavier than the Space Shuttle space suit.

As for the mobility, the joints of the suit provide the wearer with enough freedom of movement to perform any normal action, although somewhat stiffly. The suit's gloves also provide enough sensitivity to touch that at one demonstration a space suited technician was confident enough to pose for his picture holding a baby — not that the baby liked being held by a stranger in a coarse suit.

Once the astronaut is satisfied that the space suit is functioning properly, he snaps the Extravehicular Visor Assembly (EVVA) on his, or her helmet to protect him from micrometeoroids and ultraviolet or infrared radiation. Now the astronaut is ready for the space walk. The entire suiting up process has taken just a half hour — about half the time it took to don the Apollo space suit. In addition, donning an Apollo space suit usually required the assistance of one of the wearer's fellow astronauts. By contrast, the Space Shuttle can be gotten into by an astronaut unassisted.

On the first tests of the Space Shuttle space suit, the astronauts will remain on tethers which provide intercom links to the spaceship. On later space flights, however, the astronauts may be venturing far from their ship. For this, the astronaut will snap on an additional 102.06 kilogram back pack, called a Manned Maneuvering Unit (MMU), over his, or her, PLSS.

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Photos courtesy of NASA

Zero-gravity training session aboard a KC-135 flying a parabolic curve. Crew is going through a spacesuit donning session.

Basically, the MMU is a backpack spacecraft complete with steering jets and thrusters. It can propel the astronaut across space at 72.42 kilometers per hour and then hold him, or her, steady at the work site. The MMU carries enough compressed nitrogen and battery charge for six hours of flight. Its nitrogen tanks can then either be refilled at high pressure on the ground, or low pressure at the 24.96 kilogram flight station where it is stored. The two batteries which provide the MMU's electric power can be given their 16 hour recharge inside the airlock station.

Normally, only one MMU will be carried by a space shuttle, except on rescue missions. Then, two MMUs would be carried. Special rescue equipment will also be carried aboard regular Space Shuttle flights. This is needed because only the pilot and Mission Specialist will be outfitted with space suits. The ship's Commander and Payload Specialists will each have a rescue ball, which NASA calls a Personal Rescue Enclosure (PRE).

This 863.6 millimeter wide ball is made up of the same fabric as the space suit, and has a small porthole. It provides the user with a simple life support system including an hour's supply of oxygen and a communications system. The user climbs in and curls up into as small a bundle as he, or she can. Then another astronaut zips the ball shut over him, or her. A quick check of the ball's systems are made, and the astronaut is ready for transfer to the rescue shuttle.

"Three modes of transfer from one vehicle to another are now being studied by NASA engineers at JSC (the Johnson Space Center)," reports David Garrett, a NASA spokesman. "One is for a space-suited astronaut to carry the rescue balls, much like a suitcase, from one vehicle to the other. A second mode is to hook up a clothes-line-like device between the two spaceships and pass the rescue ball with its passenger from the disabled spaceship to the rescueship. A third method could be to use the remote manipulator arm in the cargo bay of the orbiter to pluck the rescue ball and its passenger from the disabled spaceship and place it aboard the rescue ship."

Just as the space suit to be worn aboard the Space Shuttle is an advance over those worn on the Apollo flights, these were improved over the Gemini space suits which in turn were improvements of the Project Mercury Pressure suit.

The Project Mercury suit was not really a space suit at all since it could not be worn outside the spacecraft in space. It also had very little mobility. When pressurized, the Mercury suit's legs became rigid, and the arms allowed only limited mobility. For this reason, the Mercury astronauts had to board their spacecraft before beginning their oxygen pre-breathing.

Space suits for the Gemini program had more flexibility so that the astronauts could do their pre-breathing of oxygen before boarding the spacecraft. These suits came in three basic types: an intravehicular suit; an EVA suit; and a light weight suit designed for being removed in the cramped cabin of the Gemini spacecraft. This latter style of space suit was

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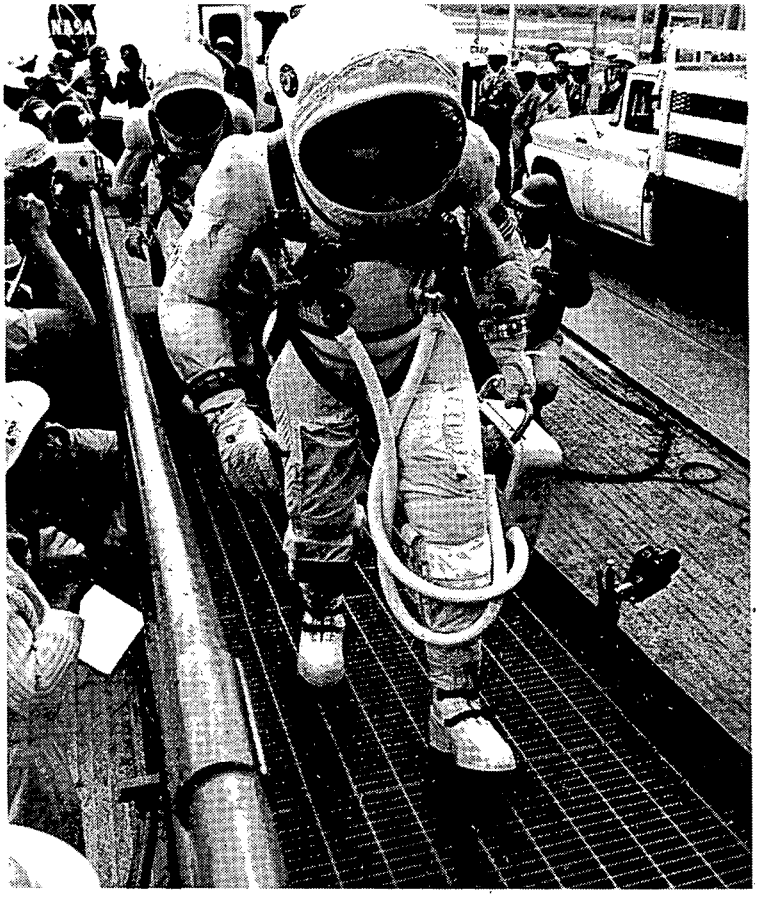

Photos courtesy of NASA

Astronauts Frank Borman and James Lovell, Jr. just before their 14-day Gemini 7 flight in 1965. Both are wearing light weight spacesuits designed for long duration flights.

used on only one mission, the fourteen-day Gemini 7 flight.

Basically, the primary improvement the Apollo space suit had over the Gemini ones was the addition of a backpack and overboots to permit the moon walks. Once again, the space suits were designed in two models: one for the astronauts who walked on the moon, and the other for the one who waited for them in moon orbit.

Both types of Apollo suits had helmets which allowed more visibility than the Mercury or Gemini suits. In addition, the outer layers of the Apollo suits were fireproof. This last measure was added after a tragic spacecraft fire killed three Apollo astronauts on the launch pad during a test on February 21, 1967.

While it is the latest thing in pressurized wear, the Space Shuttle suit is not apt to be the ultimate in space suit design. Yet it does have capabilities beyond just use for EVAs in earth orbit. With the addition of overboots, to avoid tracking dust, it could also be used on the moon. In addition, its off-the-rack feature is likely to be followed by all future space suits. ●

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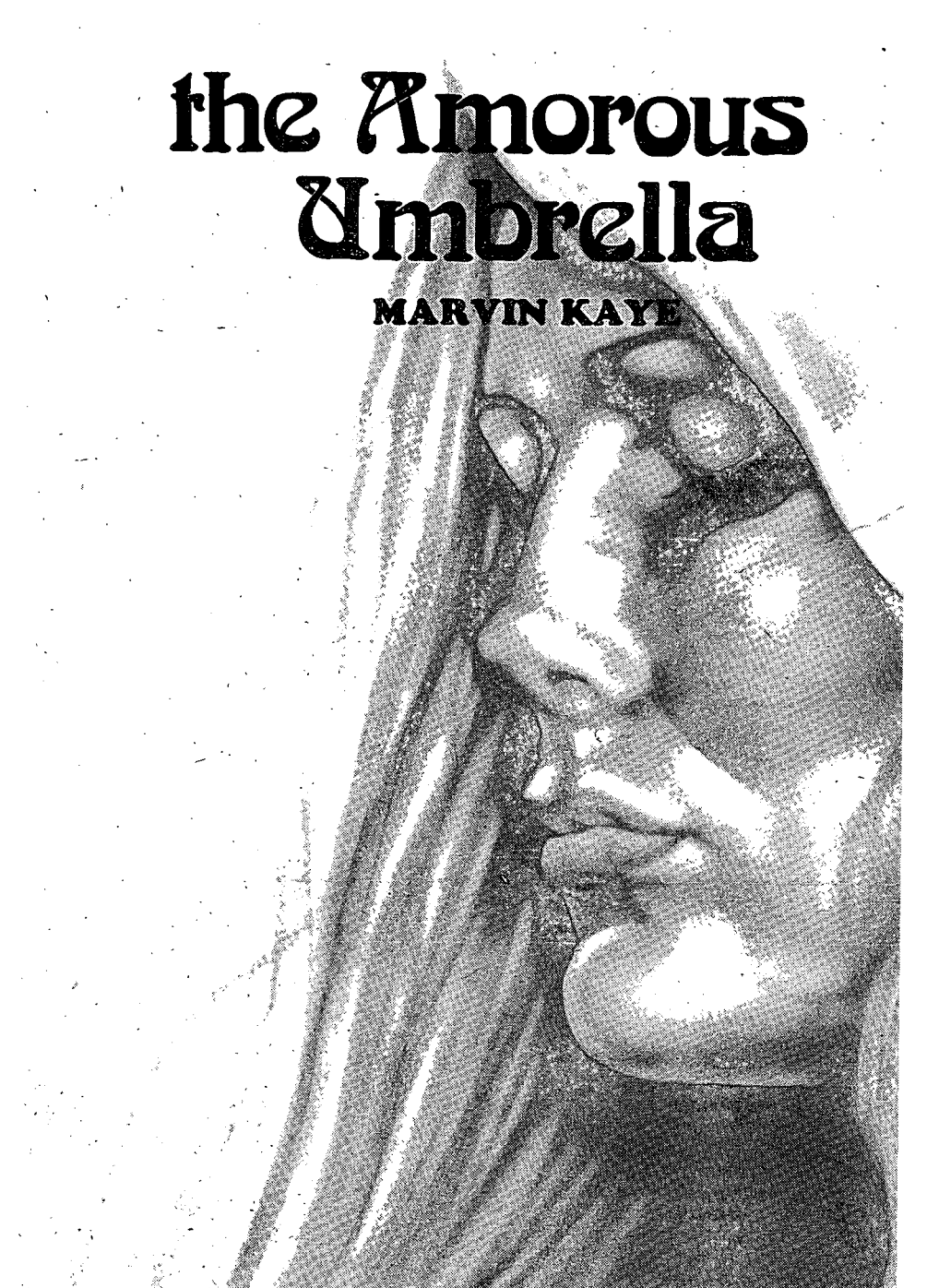

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In this excerpt from the novel we follow the brainy professor halfway on his quest for the Black Sunflower and . . . romance!

Illustrated by Gary Freeman

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PROLEGOMENON

NOT LONG ago, at Parker College in central Pennsylvania, there dwelt a dour thirtyish professor of English literature, American drama and Shakespeare. His chief frustrations were an inability to relate to the opposite sex in a manner to which he wanted to be accustomed, and a profound disparity of opinion with his department superior and thesis advisor.

One fateful day, the teacher purchased a strange object in a curio shop: ". . . a long, heavy pole that ended in a large flounce of some silky material emblazoned with orange-and-yellow stripes on which various cabalistic symbols seemed to dance in pastel figurations. It was clearly an umbrella, but its size was rather impractical: too large for everyday use, too small for beach-basking . . ."

He soon learned it was really a dimensional-transfer engine. The device whisked Prof. James Phillimore away from his mundane academic life to a succession of "literary" worlds peopled by such colorful figures as Count Dracula, Mr. Pickwick, Sherlock Holmes, and the assembled dramatis personae *of nearly all the Gilbert and Sullivan operettas.*

Oddly, none of the denizens of these strange worlds ever heard of the authors with whom Phillimore naturally associated them . . . and yet the customs on each world hewed closely to the literary styles and conventions of the writers that the professor knew so well. (Thus, the people of the Gilbert and Sullivan cosmos knew nothing whatsoever of either gifted Englishman, and yet they often broke into song that closely parodied melodies and lyrics of existing Savoyard choruses and arias. That they sang was commonplace to them, and eyebrows only lifted when the professor refused to sing.)

Eventually, Phillimore learned the rationale of the umbrella's operation. It took the user to the place determined in his mind. Since Phillimore taught literature, it was inevitable that he would be deposited on alternate worlds in other time-streams and dimensions that, in the infinite of possibilities that comprise the cosmos, happened to resemble recognizable patterns of human literary endeavor.

Holmes himself stressed Phillimore's original error: "Those worlds do not exist because they were written about on your original earth. Instead, the fiction with which you are familiar must consist of notions and conceptions telepathically borrowed across the barriers of the dimensions. Your artists may unwittingly tap the logical premises of our parallel worlds . . ."

In effect, therefore, Phillimore could use the umbrella to visit virtually any place he'd ever read about.

But there was a trap. His mind, professionally and professorially attuned to literary structure, could not always force the umbrella to transport him away from a world where danger lowered. He had a pedantic subconscious desire to "finish sequences."

Even worse, Phillimore's life (pre-umbrella) was that of an emotionally-deprived recluse. Whenever he embarked on an adventure on any of the intrinsically more alluring worlds of literature, he ran the risk of becoming "subsumed" in the base logic of that world; that is, of becoming permanently stuck in another time or place.

Only with greater self-knowledge and repeated use of the umbrella might Phillimore successfully steer past these intensely personal dangers of inter-dimensional travel.

During his flights, the professor met and befriended the Frankenstein monster, whom he appropriately named Boris. *The monster — grateful to be rescued from the bleak fate waiting for him in Shelley's novel — proved a loyal and useful companion to Phillimore. As eventual repayment for the creature's assistance, Phillimore flew Boris to the Gilbert and Sullivan world where, in typical Gilbertian fashion, the comely are often shallow and selfish, while the ugly generally are honest, moral, mellow, and ultimately well rewarded.*

Having bestowed Boris Frankenstein (the monster insisted on adopting his father's surname) in G & S-land, Phillimore resolved to seek new adventures on other as-yet-unvisited planets.

He did so, but the tale has yet to be told. The history of The Amorous Umbrella *be-*

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gins with the return of the professor to G & S-land after exploits in other parts.

ONCE UPON a time, an adoring bevy of immortal women danced about an enchanted glade feeding sweetmeats to a large, ungainly gentleman named Boris. As they busied themselves in this adulatory pursuit, the gorgeous troupe of fairies, for so they were, were wont to carol forth sweetly . . .

> Tripping hither, tripping thither,
> Nobody knows why or whither;
> We must dance and we must sing
> Round about our fairy ring!

The Frankenstein monster, for that was the identity of the man they fussed over, neither marked nor minded their lyric. All in all, he preferred their ministrations to foraging for food amongst the less-than-friendly Germanic peoples of his homeland; yet the discerning eye might note the merest trace of surfeited appetite in the monster's mien, an attitude not wholly traceable to the fairies' Acadian fare.

On the fairies' part, there was still enormous Baroque fascination to Boris' uncompromisingly frightful aspect, and they loved him for it, one and all.

All four-and-twenty.

Not far from the glade an oddly-encumbered personage suddenly appeared. It was James Phillimore, late professor of Parker College. He was a trifle weary, but not with the exhausting adventures he'd recently concluded; rather, his spirit bent under the burden of ennui.

"Probably just lonely," he told himself, turning his steps toward the fairy forest where his old friend, Boris Frankenstein, made his home. In the distance, he thought he saw the creature lolling languidly in the middle of a circle of the sisters of Iolanthe, the fey for whom W. S. Gilbert named one of his most popular operettas.

As he drew near, he heard the pattering chorus and grumbled to himself, *Don't they ever sing anything else?*

The damsels skipped delicately about the rustic landscape that was graced in the distance by a gentle river spanned by a rude wooden bridge. Their mincing dance eternally revolved about the reclining giant whose shriveled skin, lustrous black hair and lips of the same tone immediately proclaimed his identity to the approaching professor.

"Boris!" he called. "How are you?"

The monster looked up, recognized Phillimore and leaped happily to his feet. He ran forward and hugged the other in an embrace that nearly broke the teacher's ribs.

"Kindly modify your rapture!" he gasped. The monster released him immediately, grabbed a nosegay from the nearest naiad and proffered it to the scholar, who promptly sneezed and pushed it away. "Hay fever," he groaned, wiping his eyes and nose.

Boris beamed benignly before his benefactor.

"O peerless friend! O Mighty Phillimore, it hath been all too long sith I beheld thee in these parts. What marvels hath since passed? I perceive thour't not the same staid sorcerer that last I looked on!" (The monster attributed the powers of the umbrella to necromancy on the professor's part, a notion that Phillimore encouraged on the grounds that it was sound business to keep a seven-foot giant a bit in awe of one, even if the emotion *was* founded on sham. *Wizard-of-Oz ploy No. 1*, he thought).

The scholar settled himself on the ground and leaned against a tree-trunk. "I suppose, Boris, that I *have* changed a little since the last time we saw one another."

"You hath said it!" saith the monster.

Phillimore's customary dull academic garb was nowhere in evidence. Instead, he wore scarlet pantaloons cinched about the waist by a green silk sash. Save for a buttonless leather vest, his hirsute chest was bare. A multi-colored bandanna circled his brow. His sole remaining accouterments were an unwieldy curved snickersnee thrust into the sash and, of course, his trans-dimensional parasol (whose garish hues seemed less startling at that moment, viewed as they were against the professor's new raiment).

Boris joined him on the ground. They breathed the perfumed air and Iolanthe's

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fey sisters flitted from one to the other, fitting nuts in their mouths, pouring drafts of ambrosia, offering them nectar in abundance, as well as pignuts, gossamer pastries and moonlight melon.

Phillimore longed for a cheesesteak loaded with onions, peppers and hot sauce, and a flagon of Foster's to wash it down.

Boris eventually asked what his friend had been doing since last he saw him.

"Ah," Phillimore sighed, filled with *acedia*, "I've been wandering the worlds and sailing up and down on them."

"From thine numerous scars, I surmise thou hadst a devil of a time."

The other nodded. "Had quite a job just staying afloat." He shrugged. "I've always loved the sea and ships and thought if I had the time to pursue a nautical career, rather than an academic one, I'd be happy." He shook his head. "Oh, boy, was I wrong!"

Boris waved away a shellful of sugared raisins and airily told Leila and Fleta to flit off. Then he begged the professor to narrate the particulars of his recent adventures. "Perhaps," he reasoned, "I might detect some vital missing element which, once discovered, might enable thee to conquer thy present apathy."

Phillimore shrugged again. "Don't see what, but all right. First of all, though, do you think you could order me something a little less colorful to wear?"

Boris said a word to Iolanthe, the peri waved her wand and magically altered Phillimore's clothing to his customary gray vested suit and ascot.

The professor thanked the fairy, acknowledged Boris' courtesy, and began to tell his story.

It took several hours. By the time he finished, the forest was bathed in moonlight and the weary fairies sat curled upon the sward, heads daintily cradled on their forearms like ballerinas miming sleeping swans.

Nodding sagely, Boris yawned, stretched his joints and rose, all seven feet of him. A grin widened his big lips. "O Puissant Professor," said he (unaware how Phillimore detested this particular encomium, possibly because Boris' pronunciation was shaky), "at last I can repay some doit of

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that boundless kindness thou hast still shown me!"

"You can?" Phillimore asked, puzzled, as he creakily got to his feet, bracing his weight against the umbrella-shaft. "How?"

In reply, the monster flung his arms wide apart. Phillimore flinched, afraid that Boris meant to subject him to another painfully untrammeled display of affection. But the creature merely turned and indicated with outstretched hands their rustic surroundings.

"Observe," he grunted, "the many wonders of this magical forest. Yet we have but to consider the travails of our past lives to realize that the evanescent glories of this wood are as dust without the solace of companionship."

"True," Phillimore agreed, "I *have* been too much a loner. Maybe I should have asked you along on my nautical adventures, except —"

"But nay!" Boris interrupted, amused that, for once, he was more knowing than his illustrious mentor. "Thou hast mistaken mine meaning, Noble Friend! To me, 'tis apparent that thou lackest, not friendship, but rather, distaff affiliation."

Conceding the delicate distinction, the professor pensively twisted his lips. "True, true," he murmured, "I've always been unhappy about my shyness with women."

"Then you need ask no more, Mighty Benefactor!" Boris patronizingly patted his friend's head. "But take thee another glance about this glade, Master . . ."

The professor regarded the voluptuous sleeping damsels with new interest. In typical Gilbertian fashion, each maiden — though a mythical sprite who mainly dined on low-cal dewdrops and polyunsaturated starlight — yet boasted the alluring proportions of a West End music hall chorine.

Phillimore carefully mulled over Boris' offer, but at last thanking him for the generous impulse that prompted him to make it, nevertheless demurred. "I must admit, Boris, I am tempted . . . these immortal waifs *are* knockouts. But after all, you are virtually their husband — their sultan, anyway, so to speak. I can't intrude upon your sylvan existence, I'd be nothing more than an interloper."

"O say not so!" the creature wailed wearily. "'Tis true I am possessed of preternatural stamina, but there *are* limits, even for a monster! I am but one, and they are four-and-twenty, not counting the more-than-usually-ample Fairy Queen who, at present, mercifully is on a buying trip at the J.W. Wells supply house, London!"

Sinking onto the grass, Boris turned his watery eyes full upon the professor and beseeched him to reconsider.

"O Mighty Phillimore," he wheedled as he rested his great head on sandwiched hands, preparatory to sleep, "Taketh my waifs . . . *please!*"

BUT JOY incessant palls the sense, and after a few idyllically inactive weeks in Gilbertian Acadia, the professor began to feel a bit like Harold Shea stuck in Xanadu. The mild-climed glade, the caroling sprites, the insubstantial fare surfeited his jaded palate.

But the deciding circumstance was that the airy fairies treated Phillimore with the utmost respect, and that was the only treat he enjoyed of them. He wondered whether they avoided him because of his own mind (which always dictated the tenor of his adventures in spite of his conscious wishes) perceived Gilbertian morals in the Victorian stage tradition in which the operettas were rooted. Or maybe it was just a simple function of the world's topsy-turvy nature: to reward the unhandsome Boris and not the much handsomer (so the professor thought!) James Phillimore.

Whatever the reason, he was an honored guest, nothing more. And it didn't suit him one bit. In a kind of proud desperation, he told himself he didn't really fancy any of them, anyway. *All looks, no brains!* But a mocking inner voice contradicted, made him turn the matter over in his mind more than his ego wished.

The truth is, he admitted, *women never pay me much attention. I'm always thirteenth at table, Cyrano in the gloom of Roxane's garden, Sganarelle outside the bedroom-door, Lazarus at the Feast.* It's easy to insist on brains, but in his heart, Phillimore knew physical comeliness *was* important to him. The fair that toil not, that are the product of lavish nature, not their own industry, were so agonizingly out of

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reach that they naturally fascinated the professor mightily.

Beyond that, though he was essentially a soured romantic, deep within he considered the Quest for the Eternal Feminine perversely appealing. He longed for Goethe's *das ewig-weibliche* with as little comprehension of the term as Peer Gynt, but still Phillimore craved Her nearly as much as he longed for a mind edition of *Dark Carnival.*

He grumbled to Boris. "I'm going, that's for sure, and it has to be another world than this. The Gilbertian scheme insists that physical comeliness nearly inevitably coincides with shallowness.

Boris didn't understand most of what he said, but dutifully inquired where Phillimore planned to go.

"I don't know, Boris. Some world where I can find a woman that embodies all I desire in a mate."

The monster paused to quaff some mead. "The possibilities are endless," he murmured in his cup.

"You're telling me?" Butting his back against a bole, Phillimore tapped his forefinger against his forehead. "It's all in here, Boris! Every desirable woman I've ever read about . . . Shakespeare's Cleopatra, Grimm's princesses, Trollope's high society coquettes . . . Glencora and Guinevere and Galadriel and Queen Nab (as if I didn't have enough of woodland sprites!). Don Juan might envy me, Casanova turn green with jealousy!"

"Yes, yes," said Boris, "but where will you try first?"

The professor shrugged. "I think I'll just trust to luck. Whatever is in my subconscious is what I'll go with. I'll think of The Perfect Mate and press the umbrella-catch!"

The great creature rolled his watery eyes. "It sounds rather risky to me, O Professorial Phillimore!" He glanced about the glade. "Cannot aught here stay you? The Fairy Queen, you know, has just returned from London. She has ample charms."

"*Quite* ample," Phillimore murmured. "No, thanks. I may crave, indeed, a fairy princess, but these ladies are a bit too ground-treading. Every time they trip about the glade, I swear they hike up their garters."

"But they don't wear any," the monster innocently confided.

Which information only further confirmed the professor in the opinion that he didn't belong in G&S-land.

Next morning, after a brief farewell and a promise to come back and introduce Boris to his future betrothed, Phillimore betook himself to another part of the forest, where he attuned his mind to tender thoughts and delicate emotions. Then he pressed the catch of the umbrella.

It opened. A mighty wind plucked him off the ground.

Flying beyond the tinted heartwall of the pulsing universe, night screaming in his ears, the scholar did his best to concentrate solely on visions of distaff loveliness, wonder and delight . . .

Without warning, the umbrella snapped shut. Phillimore dropped heavily, sprawling on a patch of grass pale in the cloaking shadow of tall, twisted trees.

clump clump clump

A sinister music filled the air, an ominous melody he recognized from *Pictures at an Exhibition.*

clump clump clump

The ground shook with the pounding tread of approaching feet. Gigantic feet . . .

What's wrong? He rolled over, sat up, stared into the dark forest . . . and gawked at a monstrous *thing* drawing steadily nearer.

Clump Clump Clump

Phillimore scrambled to his feet, horrified. He stood in a thick, wild-looking wood in which unfriendly animal eyes peeped out all about, watching him. The brush was so tangled and tall that it choked out most of the afternoon sunlight. Somewhere nearby, angry bees droned. A hoarse raven croaked from the direction of the coming catastrophe.

CLUMP CLUMP CLUMP

No use using the umbrella, it won't work till it's cooled off! He tried to move his feet, attempted to run away from the *thing* that was now hardly twenty yards distant, but his legs were transfixed by a powerful spell of staymagic.

CLUMP CLUMP CLUMP

The nightmare hurrying toward him was

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a great thatched hut girded round with a fence of grinning skulls. Instead of resting on the earth, the frightful little house grew out of two mighty *living* 'owl legs that resembled the clawed feet of a giant turkey or rooster.

It was these bird-feet that produced the clumping sound as they carried the bizarre hut straight towards him.

It's going to trample me to death!

But suddenly the fowl-legs halted, scant inches away from him. Out of one of the windows was thrust the face of a woman with shriveled skin, baleful eyes, a big pimple-ornamented nose, few teeth, many warts, and filthy gray hair combed in an untidy sweep secured by a coil of chicken-wire. She wore a frayed gray fragment of fichu around her gnarly shoulders.

Phillimore roundly cursed the umbrella. *This is what it gives me when I specify womanly beauty?*

As if in answer to his mental grumble, the crone cackled and addressed him in a raspy voice.

"Yoohoo, sonnyevitch! Have I got a girl for you!"

PHILLIMORE SAT in a comfortable, if slightly mildewy armchair in the old woman's parlor and tried to get a word in edgewise.

It wasn't easy. She rattled on, fussing over the professor as if he were the Prodigal Hen come home to roost. Below and beneath the floorboards, the hut's fowl-feet stomped through the woods, making the tiny house pitch and tremble. But compared with the last voyage he'd taken, he was scarcely troubled by the motion.

The professor knew enough about Russian folklore to identify the witch. Her name was Baba Yaga, and she was a Slavic variant of the British bogey-man or the American fool-killer; she existed chiefly to frighten willful children into better behavior. There was another detail connected with her, too, but he couldn't recall it. The thing which convinced him of her identity was the famous hut on fowl's legs itself. An essential part of the Baba Yaga legend, the strange dwelling, circled by victims' grinning skulls, constantly stalked the woods, seeking bad youngsters for the witch to capture and devour.

But I hardly fit the classification, he mused wryly. *Then why am I here?*

"Nu, sonnyevitch, put down your umbrella, it ain't raining inside! Take off your shoes, get comfortable. Maybe you're cold? I'll get you a nice *glayzala tay* . . ." As she spoke, she patted and prodded him fondly with bony fingers. But a sly light glinted from her one green eye.

And yet, even though he distrusted her, Phillimore rather liked the old woman, she reminded him vaguely of someone dear, he couldn't remember exactly who.

As she pottered about getting the tea ready, he scanned the surroundings with interest. It was a small single-chamber hut, with two chairs, a kitchen table and a cot comprising the principal furniture. A large iron cauldron hung over a stone fireplace, next to which was curled a chubby gray cat with yellow eyes. The animal regarded the newcomer with sour amusement.

Baba Yaga stirred the cauldron once or twice, then ladled out an amber mixture which Phillimore presumed must be the tea. As he watched her tender ministrations, he suddenly realized who she reminded him of.

Can't do enough for me, wants to fix me up with a woman. Won't let me get a word in edgewise!

Wistfully, he thought about his late foster mother.

"You know, you're different from what I would have expected," Phillimore remarked.

"How could you expect?"

"Well, you're Baba Yaga, right?"

For some reason, the witch clapped both her hands over her mouth. She waited a moment before uncovering so she could speak. "How would you know my name?" she asked somewhat nervously, but nothing happened and she exhaled with apparent relief.

What's wrong with her? Something to do with . . . But Phillimore couldn't bring it to mind.

"I said, how do you know who I am?"

"Sometimes," he said, "I'm a bit fey. Anyway, I've heard stories about Baba Yaga. All about how you eat up wicked children."

"Ho-boy!" she snorted, with a disgusted sweep of her hand. "I knew I never should

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have accepted that retainer!"

"I don't understand."

"Whole bunch of local peasants commission me to keep the brats in line. I ride around the forest scaring the crap out of the little darlingskis."

"Then you don't actually eat them?"

Again she startled Phillimore by clapping both her hands over her mouth. Then, finger by finger, she pried them away and replied circumlocutiously, "I'm not saying I eat kids, I'm not saying I don't, sonnyevitch — all I'm saying is there's a lot of PR connected with this kid-scaring sideline I've got, and if you want to believe one way or the other, how can I say the opposite?" But she slapped one hand against her cheek and rocked her head and moaned, half to herself, "Oy vey! The things an old lady's gotta put up with!" She gave him an affronted squinty glare and waggled a thin finger at him. "I'm not saying what I do or don't do, mine little guestnik, but this I'll say; eating kids is *Feh!* Take my word for it or don't!"

With that, she dismissed the subject and poured the tea into a somewhat chipped crystal tumbler. She handed it to Phillimore. He raised it to his lips, feeling the warmth of the brew through the glass. But before taking a sip, he stopped and stared at the fat feline in the corner.

Its mouth turned down in disgusted disapproval and it slowly and emphatically shook its shaggy head.

Baba Yaga caught the movement from the side of her eye. She swiveled around angrily and shouted at the cat.

"Don't be a butt-inski, Rimski! Go catch mice!"

"Hmph," the cat sniffed disparagingly, "if *you* don't eat kiddies, Babala, then *I* don't eat mice." He yawned, then licked his paws in lordly fashion.

The witch made an indignant appeal to the professor. "I *ask* you, where today is it possible to find good help?"

Phillimore's eyes goggled from his head. "But the cat talked!"

"Such a miracle?" she sneered. "It would be more amazing, sonnyevitch, if (he only) knew when to shut up!"

Rimski shrugged. "So, all right, I'm bothering you. So I'll go out."

And the cat vanished.

The teacher recovered his wits with difficulty. His trembling hands spilled some tea as he set down the tumbler. A drop or two splashed on the floor and killed a pair of amorous cockroaches.

"You're nervous, dollink?" Baba Yaga inquired solicitously. "Sip a little *tay*, it'll put you to sleep."

"I'll *bet* it will."

"Maybe you think I'm from poisoning guests? Feh! In such business is no profit, take my word from it!"

"You're telling me this is just a sleeping potion?"

"Would *I* give you something that would not be good for you?" Baba Yaga asked, carefully countering his question with a question.

Some detail of the Baba Yaga legend kept niggling at Phillimore's mind. A little more concentration and he'd have it. *Something to do with questions . . .*

"All I wanted is to make my little guest-eleh nice and comfy, so I figured you'd be happy if you could *gaien shlafen* for a while and —"

"And then," interrupted Rimski's bored voice from mid-air, "she'd zap you with a geas."

"Hoo-boy, am I gonna give it to you, cat!" she shrilled, leaping to her feet. "If I ever catch you, I'll turn you into a tax collector!"

The awful threat didn't phase the invisible Rimski. "In that case," he meowed, "I'll make sure you don't catch me."

Turning back to Phillimore, the old biddy flashed him a sycophantically ingratiating smile, but he was on his feet, umbrella in hand, ready to push the catch and escape. His thumb joggled against the button as the hut on fowl legs clumped over some particularly rocky terrain below.

"So that's what you're up to," the professor accused. "Magic spells so I'd have to do whatever you will me to perform!"

"We-e-ell," she wheedled. "I *was* going to ask you a favor, but I have to be careful, see? Any time —"

"Why fool around with magic when you could just ask?"

"NO QUESTIONS!" she yelled, startling Phillimore. "DON'T ASK ME QUESTIONS!"

"Look," he snapped, "I've had about

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enough of this mystification. Why don't you tell me already what you want?"

Baba Yaga's face went white. A fearful curse escaped her lips and she began stumping around the room and venting her temper on the scant furnishings. She kicked over a rush-broom, pounded the table and smashed a sugar bowl, whirled three times on her left toe and spat in the teakettle.

Wonder how often she does that? He was doubly glad he didn't drink any.

"OOOHHH!" Baba Yaga howled, wringing her wrinkled hands, "now you've *done* it!"

"Done *what?*"

His second question provoked an even louder yowl. She bashed her head against the fireplace in frustration, then, in a paroxysm of rage, ripped a bag of dried bear-snouts out of an herb-box and scattered them wildly around the room. "STOP WITH THE QUESTIONS!" she screamed, then suddenly threw herself into a cane bottom chair and began to sob.

Feeling sorry for her without knowing why, he patted her shoulder and asked what was wrong. But that made her shriek again and knock his hand away.

"Now it's three unavoidable questions! Idiot! SHUT UP!" She tore her hair in rage and despair. "A year a question! Now I'll lose three years because you can't stop with the dumke questions . . . and *that's* what's wrong, Shlubya!"

No sooner were the words out of her mouth than she began shaking so violently that she flopped off her chair and banged her pimply proboscis on the unplaned planks of the rustic flooring. As she flailed about, Phillimore remembered the missing piece of the Baba Yaga myth.

After quite some time, she quieted and feebly crept back to her seat. The furrows in her forehead were etched deeper than before, and the sparkle in her single blue eye had perceptibly dimmed.

"Nu," she wheezed, "ain't you gonna wish me happy birthday?"

He did.

"That," the witch gasped, "is what happens when I have to answer a question. I age twelve months in a minute . . . and *that's* what you've done, shmendrick!"

As soon as she said it, she was seized by another convulsion, exactly like the first. It tossed her about for precisely sixty seconds and so enfeebled her that, when it was over, Phillimore had to help her hobble over to the bug-infested pallet by the far wall of the hut.

"A picnic it ain't," she complained. "Whenever I get a visitor, sooner or later some question pops out that I can't avoid answering and then *wham-bam!*" She exhaled shakily. "*Gevalt,* I ain't as young as I used to be!"

He nodded. "Then I assume that's why you were going to knock me out and fix a quest-spell on me. That way I'd go do your bidding without asking questions."

"Is that," she glared suspiciously, "*another* question?"

"No, it's an assumption."

"Good," she murmured, plopping her head on her pillow, "assume all you want, sonnyevitch."

She lay still for quite a while. Finally, the professor suggested it was about time she explained what she wanted him to do.

"Not now," she demurred, "that would answer your third question and I ain't up yet to another four seasons. Let me rest a while. Instead, you should tell me about yourself. Like how come a big *boytchik* like yourself walks in the forest with an umbrella but no galoshes?"

To pass the time, he spoke about his adventures in various worlds and told Baba Yaga all he knew of his umbrella's peculiar properties. She looked so feeble lying there he could see no harm in being totally honest.

It was a serious tactical error.

THE HUT stood motionless in the middle of a moonlit clearing. Every so often, one or the other of its bird-feet lifted to scratch an itch on the opposite leg. Trotting around the side of the shack, Baba Yaga stuck two shriveled fingers in the corners of her mouth and vented an ear-splitting whistle.

"That," she cackled, "will fetch Walter, right enough. Wait, sonnyevitch, he'll be here in a couple minutes."

Out of deference to her penchant for instant chronology, Phillimore refrained from asking who or what Walter might be. *Just hope it's nothing too gruesome.*

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The professor was ready to start out on the witch's quest, or at least to make a great show of doing so for her sake. He was tired of her company and especially of the sour chicken-fat odor of her hut. But his main reason for wanting to get away from her (and any spells she might have the power to cast should he seem recalcitrant to her wishes) was that he intended to entirely escape her world. *The umbrella can do better than Russian fairy-tales!* Other than Baba Yaga, he knew practically nothing of Slavic myth; the only reason her tale was vaguely familiar to the professor was because of his lifelong interest in fantasy-horror literature.

Earlier, after Baba Yaga somewhat recovered from two years of on-the-spot aging, she offered him supper and a blanket for the night. Fearing the first (though perhaps not so much as the second), Phillimore politely declined. To spare her feelings (on the grounds that it was poor policy to wound a witch's vanity), he expressed a keen desire to set out right away on her errand.

"How come suddenly you got *shpilkes?*" she wondered, squinting at him suspiciously. "I ain't even said yet what my favor is."

"I'm in a generous mood. I can't refuse you anything."

"You just did." She sighed. "However, health comes foremost, and I can't wait too much longer to drink the magic elixir. Another year or two could kill me!"

He began to ask what she meant by a magic elixir, but hardly were his lips open than she gestured for silence. "Clamp a lid on it, blabbermouth! I'm *telling*, I'm *telling!*"

"Sorry, I forgot. But it's hard to restrain curiosity."

"Oh, is it?" she asked sweetly. "Would it help if I turned you into a tarantula?"

"That's all right," he gulped, "very kind of you, but I think I can manage from now on."

"Go-oo-od, sonnyevitch, go-oo-ood," Baba Yaga crooned. "Now give a listen — there ain't no way I can stop myself from growing a year older when I get asked questions, that's in my original contract. However, my agent managed a kind of escape clause so's I can backtrack and get young again. I have to whomp up a drink made outta falernum, pig-sweat, slivovitz and black sunflower, put it in a blender and run ten seconds at Mix — *yah, yah, I can see you dying to ask, I got blenders. I'm a witch, ain't I?* — and serve stirred, not shaken, on the rocks. After I swig it down, I drop couple hundred years maybe, and believe me, is *that* a *machaiya!*"

"I suppose," said Phillimore, "it's impossible to home-grow these black sunflowers."

"Was *that* a question?" she yelped, reaching for a book with the ominous title, *Wells' Magic and Spells: Blessings, Curses, Ever-Filled Purses, Prophecies, Witches, Knells.*

"A supposition, only a supposition!"

"It better be, buster!" she snarled, replacing the tome. "Now *the* black sunflower grows on a certain enchanted island. One at a time, see? It gets picked and then another grows a long, long time later." She paused fearfully, but evidently Phillimore's last remark was credited as a mere supposition, so nothing happened to the witch. Heartened by her escape, she continued with greater enthusiasm.

"Okay, sonnyevitch, now pay attention 'cause soon is coming the part you're gonna like! On this enchanted island lives the prettiest, sweetest, purest, most innocent young lady you'd ever want to meet! A real *zoftich maidele*, and *stacked* like you wouldn't believe! Over there is a magazine, pick it up and flip, you'll see!"

Phillimore plucked a tattered copy of *Necromantic Age* out of a small pile of tidily-arranged soot. It was evidently a trade magazine for sorcerers, warlocks, witches and other magical practitioners. The issue evidently had been bent back many times to a certain story, for when he picked it up, it fell open to a colorful spread of photos and text that told about an unusual spell of staymagic holding a young woman (simply identified as the Beautiful Child) on an unnamed verdant isle, latitude and longitude unknown. He noted with vague disquiet that certain passages of the article's text had been blacked over so they were totally illegible. And at the bottom right of the right-hand page he saw a picture had been torn out of the periodical. *No point asking*

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her about it, she'll get mad and won't tell me, anyway.

"Nu, sonnyevitch," she grinned, "some knockers, hah? If Mama Yaga was just telling, you wouldn't be believing, but there you are, the magazine is showing, so now get ready to go fetch me that black sunflower and when you bring it back, the broad should come, too, and I'll fix it up permanent between the two of you! Now excuse me for one minute, I just answered your remaining question and — HOOBOYYYYYYYYY!!!"

While she quivered and quaked, Phillimore tried to decide what was niggling away at the back of his brain that made him so uneasy about the enchanted island. The thought would not come, *but it doesn't really matter, anyhow, because I'm not going in the first place.*

At least, having seen the picture of the damsel on the isle, he had to admit the umbrella *had* been trying to do its job right, after all.

The witch, having gotten her breath back, told the professor she had a friend named Walter who'd be of immense help on his journey. Before he could protest that he preferred traveling alone, Phillimore suddenly was hurtled across the room where he landed head-downwards in a barrelful of rancid pickle-brine. This circumstance was the direct result of the crone's abruptly ordering her hut to come to a screeching halt.

Phillimore extricated himself with considerable spluttering from the gherkin-juice. Before he could recover his wits, Baba Yaga whirled him merrily around by both hands in a grotesque peasant dance, then yanked him outside the door, down the steps and into the summery gloom of the deep woods.

She whistled a second time. From somewhere in the midst of the trees, not too far away, came a cross bass voice.

"I'm coming as fast as I can, you old bone-sack! Contain your urine! I'm not a bag-pipe!"

Recognizing the Shakespearean allusion, Phillimore strained his eyes to see the speaker, but the moonlight did not illuminate the depth of the forest. He did not have to wait long, though. Soon, to his ears there came the muted *clipclop* of hooves. Out of the night suddenly cantered the most remarkable creature the professor had seen in quite some time.

It was a lean, sinewy stallion with mournful red eyes and a dour expression that twisted its large muzzle sideways, giving it the appearance of one about to spit in disgust. The most unusual thing about the riderless creature was its coat; it glowed bright pink in the rays of the waxing moon.

"Walter," said the witch, "I want you should meet a friend of mine."

"Pfui," Walter rumbled in his raspy, deep voice, "any friend of yours is bound to be a real *zhlub.*" He regarded Phillimore darkly. "What're you gawking at, shorty?"

"You're pink!"

Curling his lip contemptuously, Walter complimented the professor on his perspicacity. "If pink is good enough for elephants, then how come you object to the way I look?"

"I don't object," the man soothed the animal. "I just never saw such a hue on a horse before."

"Damn right I'm hoarse," Walter growled and lapsed into contemplative silence.

"Walter here will be your noble charger," Baba Yaga informed the professor. "He can read road-maps good, and on his back, you'll make better time, too."

Walter snorted at the last notion, but said nothing.

"But I don't need to ride," Phillimore reasoned. "I can fly wherever I want to go with my umbrella." He started towards the hut. "I'll be just a minute, I left it inside."

He didn't notice the witch make a certain hand-signal behind his back, but he immediately observed that as soon as he approached the hut, its two clawed legs began to hobble towards the forest.

Phillimore stopped. The hut stopped. He sprinted forward three steps. It trotted backwards the same distance. He sidled sideways. It edged laterally, but in the opposite direction.

Disgusted, he turned to the witch. "Ask your skittish house to stand still!"

Smiling a broad, unpleasant grin, she apologized for the hut's recalcitrance. "What can an old lady do with a *dumke* chicken without a head? I'll be lucky to get back in it myself!"

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"But I have to get my umbrella!"

"Not with Walter handy." She bowed and ducked her head in conciliatory fashion. "Nu, you shouldn't worry, sonnyevitch, Mama Yaga will take good care of your umbrella *till you come back with the black sunflower.*"

Phillimore got the point. He sighed, defeated. "It won't work for you, you know. It's imprinted with my brain-set and won't operate for anyone else."

She looked positively scandalized. "Are you accusing that *I* would touch your crummy umbrella? Since when have I given you cause to make such nasty thinkings?"

"Two questions," the teacher snapped. "Why don't you answer them yourself!?" He turned away, thoroughly disgruntled with his own stupidity, with the witch's duplicity, with Boris' original suggestion that he seek The Perfect Mate and finally, as always, with the unpredictable caprices of the umbrella itself. "Come on, Walter," he glumly grumbled, "let's go."

"Okay," the stallion snorted, "but if you climb up on me, I'll dump you in a cesspool!"

Oh, boy, Phillimore mused silently. *Some quest this is going to be!* With a resigned shrug, he followed Walter out of the clearing.

Immediately, the hut pranced over to Baba Yaga, paused while its mistress entered, then resumed its customary sylvan perambulations.

MAN AND beast trudged along a broad path that cut, with few twists, through the forest. The foliage was thick, too tangled to permit much light to penetrate, yet here and there a pallid patch shone with surprising distinctness in the irregular illumination of the wistful moon.

Walter knew the trail well, but Phillimore often stumbled over unexpected stumps and stones. The horse did his best to endure it patiently, but when the other tripped and landed rather heavily against his flank, Walter neighed nastily, "Pick up your feet, klutz!"

"Sorry. I lost my footing."

"*Do* tell!" the animal grumped in his gravelly bass. "If I'd known how clumsy you are, I would've borrowed Baba's firebird so you could see where you put your feet."

"I'll attempt to be more careful," Phillimore said rather stiffly.

Walter disdainfully shook his mane. "Thanks for trying, shorty, but you'll probably break your neck long before you reach the island." Beneath his breath, the horse mumbled, "Which'll probably be more pleasant, anyhow."

Phillimore caught it. *Uh-oh.* A too-familiar chill tickled an arpeggio along the length of his backbone, an unwelcome sensation frequently experienced on umbrella-jaunts. "Suddenly," he addressed the horse, "I have a feeling this errand isn't quite as easy as Baba described it."

Lustily clearing his hoarse throat, Walter tried to change the subject. "You commented on my scratchy voice before. Want to know how I got this way?"

"Not particularly."

"Cigar-smoking."

"You smoked cigars?"

"Naw, a toad I once knew, when I used to hang around the swamp, was always puffing away. Said he was a congersman."

"The word is *congressman,*" Phillimore punctiliously emended, but with little real interest. "And would you like a ladder to get down off this story?"

"It's true," said the horse. "And that's the way *he* pronounced the word. Anyway, he was always blowing cheap smoke in my face. Y'see, sometimes I used to let 'im ride on my neck, and I think that's when I developed this chronic hoarseness. I must've been allergic to his stinking stogies."

"Serves you right for not taking care of the frog on your throat," the professor replied. "Now stop avoiding my question. You won't discourage me about this quest . . . I *have* to get back my umbrella! But at least you might prepare me for what I'm going to run into on that rotten island."

"How should I know? I never set hoof there."

"You haven't?"

"Nope. I only take you as far as the final boat. I'll hang around on the shore for a few days and if you don't come back, I'll tell Baba you screwed up, too."

"*Too?*"

"You bet your borscht-belt. Whaddaya think, you're the first sap she's suckered

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on this gig? In the old days, there was nothing to it, I'd escort her errand-boys or -girls back and forth, but ever since the island got magicked, it's been strictly a one-way trip for them." He licked his great lips with a light-pink tongue. "Sorry, but you wanted the truth."

"Thanks," Phillimore glumly replied. "Now I know the worst."

"That all depends," said Walter, "on how you feel about Hessians."

"*What?*" Phillimore shook his head, thinking he'd heard incorrectly. "Did you say *Hessians?*"

"You repeat like a radish," the horse replied dourly. "Actually, it's just one Hessian, but he's behind us. You'd better get a move on."

Phillimore looked around to see what Walter was talking about. There on the trail several yards further back but slowly approaching was a coal-black charger on which was mounted a tall, dark-caped figure with a vaguely military air about him. The professor thought he spied the glint of dress-uniform brass buttons and braid, but he couldn't be positive, it was too dark.

"Who *is* he, Walter? Why's he following us?"

"Not us, buster, just you. He occasionally shows up on this road around about this time of night. He'll disappear once he reaches the bridge a little way ahead."

The mention of the bridge caused an unpleasant thought to pop into Phillimore's mind. Glancing back again, he studied the rider more closely. The Hessian plodded along at an easy gait, but though his horse paced unhurriedly, still it steadily diminished the distance between mounted horseman and horse and man on foot. Suddenly the soldier cantered into a sickly pool of moonlight and in that instant, Phillimore got his first clear glimpse of his pursuer.

Just as he'd feared, the gigantic, cloak-muffled man had no head above the stiff, high circle of his collar. But on his saddle-pommel he balanced a grisly object that the professor did not care to inspect too carefully.

Walter confided, "He's got an incurable hankering for other people's craniums. I don't know if he's looking for his own head, or just one that fits."

"He has a head already," Phillimore whispered weakly.

"Yeah, but as soon as he gets a new one, he'll throw the old model away."

The professor swallowed with difficulty. "Uh, how far ahead *is* that bridge?"

"From here? Maybe 800 meters."

"That far?" Calculating quickly, he groaned, "That's almost half-a-mile!"

The horse nodded. "Better shake a leg, shorty."

"Uh . . . I don't suppose you'd change your mind about letting me ride you, just for a little while?"

The pink steed snorted, refusing to dignify the question with any further reply.

"I didn't think so," Phillimore sighed. Then, taking a deep breath, he started off at a sprint. He called over his shoulder to Walter, "See you at the bridge!"

"If you make it," the horse observed darkly.

As soon as the professor began to run, the ghostly horseman lightly touched spurs to his charger and his midnight stallion quickened its pace.

While Phillimore scrambled and stumbled along the path, he wondered what the hell the headless horseman was doing in Russia. *Sleepy Hollow is in upstate New York! Maybe —*

But there wasn't time to calmly contemplate the implication. He jogged on as fast as he could safely manage without tripping over roots, rocks or other impedimenta.

He shot a brief glance backwards. The spectral horse trotted along silently, little by little closing the gap. *Perhaps he's a sportsman,* Phillimore thought, noticing that the Hessian had not yet urged his steed to its swiftest gait.

Beneath the professor's speeding feet, the dry leaves crackled, the only sound in the deep woods.

Or is it?

Maybe it was the strangeness of the surroundings, or the ghastly nature of his pursuer, but Phillimore began to imagine he heard the soft subtle sound of something running alongside him on the forest trail. He couldn't be sure; it was only a faint rustle, yet it seemed slightly out of phase with his own hurrying footsteps.

"Dammit!" he gasped, "IS there something running beside me?" He muttered sourly, "My luck, it's The Damned Thing!"

"I *beg* your pardon!" said an affronted

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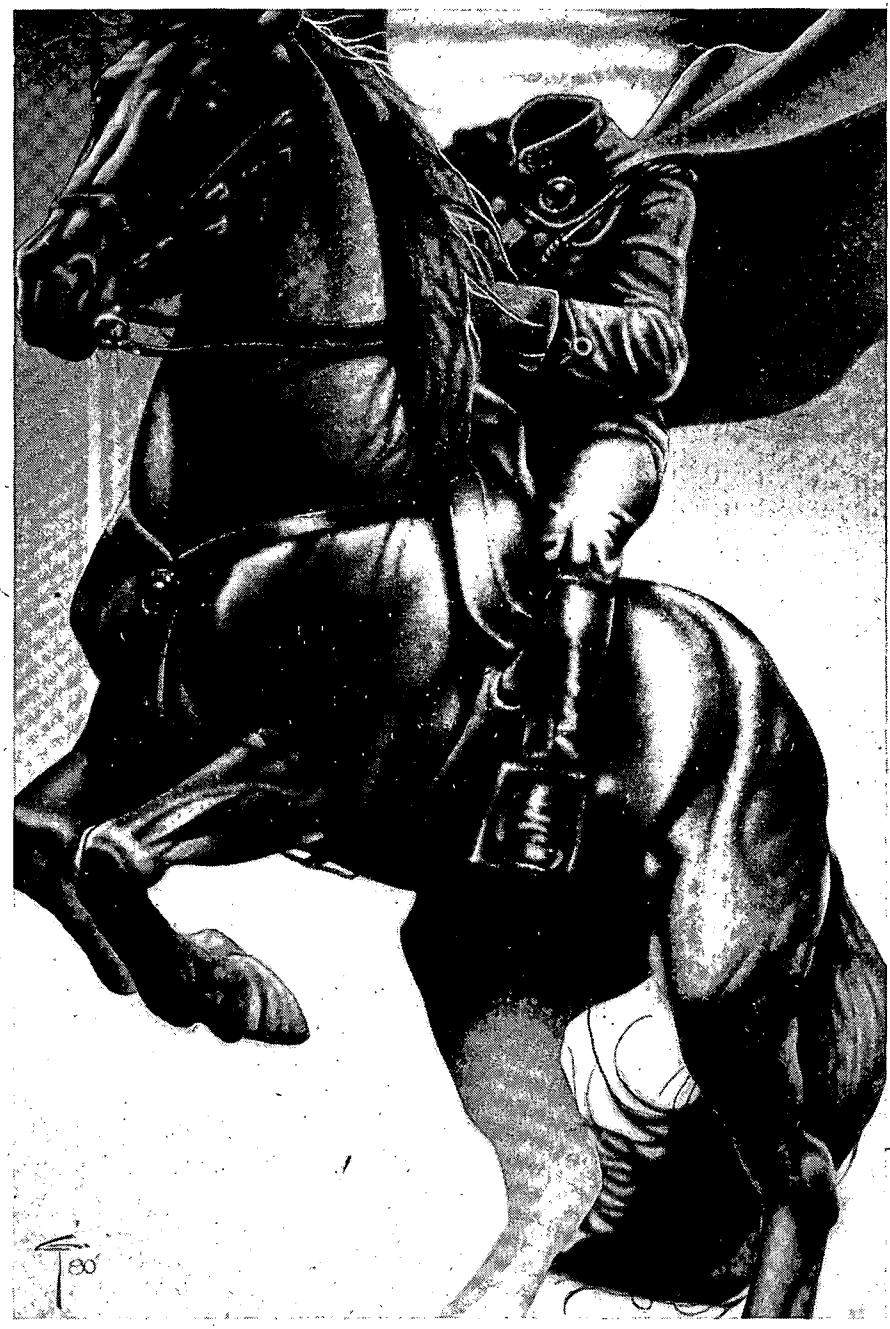

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voice practically beneath his feet. It so startled the professor that he broke stride, stubbed his toe, yelped and sprawled flat on his face.

"Hmph," a voice he'd heard before sniffed. "Better get up before the dummy grabs you."

Shoving himself quickly to his knees, Phillimore stared fearfully back down the path. The horseman was now only some fifty feet distant. As he watched, he saw him draw a long saber that glinted dangerously in a vagrant shaft of lunar light.

"Get up, goofball!" the voice urged. "Follow me!"

"Are you kidding?" the professor protested, rising. "I can't even *see* you."

"Oh, yeah, I forgot . . . sorry!" With that, Baba Yaga's large gray cat, Rimski, instantly materialized. "Now stay close behind." He padded across the road and ducked through a gap between two distressingly conspicuous maple trees.

However, inasmuch as *a)* the headless horseman was by now a scant thirty feet away and *b)* it was Rimski who stopped the professor from swigging the witch's hypnotic and *c)* he could see no other hope for escape, anyway, Phillimore decided to trust the feline. He ran between the maples and hurried over to the place where the cat's eyes glinted in the gloom.

"Let him ride past," the cat whispered. "He will."

Phillimore was skeptical, but he did his best to hold his breath, which wasn't easy, since he'd been running. Still, he forced himself to avoid twitching a single muscle. Soon, to his astonishment, the phantom reached the place where he'd left the road, but neither slackened pace nor even glanced in the direction of the unmistakable lofty maples.

"How'd you know he wouldn't —" Phillimore began, but the cat hissed for silence.

"He's dumb, but not deaf," Rimski whispered.

They waited a good two or three minutes before the cat spoke again. "That'll take care of him for the night. Pretty soon he'll be at the bridge."

"How'd you know he'd do that?"

"He's as dim-witted as a rhino. By the time he got to the spot, he forgot you even existed. No brains at all."

"You mean because he doesn't have a head?"

"I mean because he's a Hessian." The cat stretched and yawned. "I hope you don't mind that I've been following you and Walter all this time."

"I'm glad you did!" said Phillimore. "Would you mind, though, if I asked you a few questions?"

"Not at all," Rimski meowed importantly.

"First off, how'd you learn to disappear like that?"

"Pretty flashy, huh?" The cat was obviously proud of his talent.

"Did Baba Yaga bestow the power on you?"

"Hmph!" Rimski grunted. "From that old biddy I don't get *bupkis!* Naah, I picked up the trick a couple years back from an English cat I met on vacation."

"An *English* cat?" Phillimore smiled. "Was he, by any chance, from Cheshire?"

"As a matter of fact, he was. You know him?"

"No, but I've heard of him. He vanishes and just leaves his smile behind, right?"

"Yeah," Rimski drawled disapprovingly, "he pulls that sometimes. Cheap trick, if you ask me."

Sour grapes, perhaps? Phillimore tried wheedling the cat. "I've always wondered about it, though. I mean, how *can* one see a grin without also at least part of the cat behind it?"

"Wonder away, professor, you'll never catch me doing it."

"Why not?"

"Around here," Rimski said scornfully, "what's there to smile about? *Next question?*"

Sitting down to rest, Phillimore asked the cat how it had been possible for the headless horseman to see him in the first place. "Does he use the eyes of the head he carries?"

"I doubt that," the cat said, after mulling it over for a moment. "Allowing for the possible piecemeal survival of the victim's spirit, and assuming that same *geist*, so to speak, chooses to hang around its separated head, still it's very unlikely it would allow its appropriated orbs to do service to the predator who stole the head in the first place. No, no," the cat meowed mellowly, "I would postulate that the horseman sees

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with astral optics."

"You appear to be something of a philosopher," the professor remarked, impressed.

"Thanks for noticing," said Rimski, gratefully rubbing himself against the man's legs. "That's what I once was."

"I don't follow."

"You see before you the transmogrification of a fledgling philosopher. But though my thoughts pursue their arcane windings as before, I cannot write them down since Baba klopped me with a spell."

"You mean she changed you into a cat?"

"Precisely. Which is how I can speculate with authority on the behaviour of victims of the supernormal."

"What did you do to provoke her?"

"It's what I *didn't* do," the cat purred.

"Namely?"

"I wouldn't go fetch her a sunflower."

"If that's so," Phillimore asked, "why are you here with me? Change your mind?"

"Hardly. It's just that it's safer than hanging around the hut. Baba threatened that she'd change me back into a tax collector."

"*Back* into? I thought you said you were a philosopher!"

"Avocationally. Who can make with the Venns and zens and earn a living?"

"Well," Phillimore mused, "in the world I came from, there was sometimes a lot of money to be made playing guru or pragmatic philosopher. There was even a foreign businessman who made a fortune by persuading teenagers to attain inner peace by relinquishing all their personal property to him."

The cat chortled. "And I thought *this* place is loony!"

"I'm still confused, though, Rimski. If you used to be a tax collector until Baba Yaga turned you into a cat, then why would you run away now that she wants to remove the spell?"

"Because," the animal sighed, "*she* knows and *I* know that, compared with collecting taxes, it's not so bad being a cat."

"Why do you emphasize *so?*"

Rimski shrugged. "Catting has its drawbacks, like any other line."

"Such as?"

"The worst part," he replied, grimacing, "is trying to acquire a taste for mice."

Despite the unappetizing lead-in, Phillimore realized that he hadn't himself eaten in several hours. He mentioned it to the cat.

"Okay, I know a house where you can mooch some dinner," Rimski said. "It's a little out of the way, but eventually we'll get back to the bridge. Are you game?"

"Yes."

"Then follow me." The cat started over a nearby knoll. It led to a narrow path that paralleled the road, but with frequent detours and roundabouts. The professor did his best to keep Rimski in view, but it was dark and he often lost sight of him. However, the considerate feline soon sensed the other's confusion and made sure to turn around every so often so Phillimore could catch the yellow glimmer of his eyes.

They wove a twisted circuit for perhaps a quarter of an hour. Then, spying a tiny cottage a little way off nestling snugly in a dim dingle, Phillimore hailed the cat.

Rimski loped over to him. "Better not stick around here," he warned. "This is a very popular neck of the woods for all sorts of mischief."

"But that house over there . . . I thought that might be where you were taking me."

"Normally I would," the cat said, "but not tonight, it's bad timing. The place we want is right next to the road, three rises from now."

"What do you mean by bad timing?"

The cat flicked its tail in the direction of the cottage. "The owner's kind of grumpy, he just got burgled this morning. It's not a good time to ask him for charity."

"Burgled?" The professor repeated the word, surprised; somehow he always associated that crime with city dwellers on the idyllically distorted assumption that the country is the last outpost of a more innocent civilization.

"It's no big deal," the cat explained with a yawn. "While the family was out, some snotty kid busted in, broke some furniture, ate up their kid's food, then, to top it off, clumps all over the bedspreads with muddy boots yet. Now I *ask* you — what's happening to good old respect for private property?" He paused for an answer but Phillimore, to Rimski's surprise and annoyance, just stood there, eyes wide and mouth half-agape. "Professor," he mewed with some pique, "haven't you been listen-

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ing to me at all?"

"What?" Oh, *yes!* Yes, I have — I'm sorry! It's just that while you were talking, an idea I've been chasing around in my head for almost an hour finally surfaced. Your tale made it happen."

"It *did?"* Rimski stared suspiciously at his nether member.

"Listen, were you still in the room when I told the witch about my umbrella?"

"Yes. Invisible and listening."

"Did you believe what I said?" Phillimore asked.

"Once you've tasted Baba's cooking, anything is possible," he replied with a shudder.

"All right, Rimski. Now since you're a philosopher, I doubt that you'll have any difficulty countenancing the preternatural implications of what I'm about to explain . . ."

But before the professor could utter another word, the cat emitted a hair-raising shriek.

Phillimore shrugged, somewhat nonplussed. "Well, of course, if metaphysics upsets you, I wouldn't think —"

"Noodnick!" the cat snapped, leaping up. "Somebody just stepped on my tail!"

Jumping to his feet, the professor looked around, but all he could see was the night-shadowed forest . . . then, without preamble or permission requested, countless dainty hands suddenly reached out of the darkness and seized him.

Drums rumbled. Trumpets blared. A brilliant burst of light sprang up all around, dazzling the professor's eyes and totally confusing him. The woods rang with merry laughter, sparkling but heartless.

THE MUSIC rollicked and swelled. Phillimore was swirled about so swiftly that he was powerless to resist. Coronets shined and flashing diadems twinkled past while he was delicately compelled to quickstep all about the green. In the midst of the melee, he thought he caught the hilarious roar and spoor of a wild good-humored beast cavorting nearby, but could not possibly stop to study the source.

When the tempo accelerated, something quite remarkable happened. Perhaps it was the kinesthetic consequence of his exertions and exploits of the past few hours, but suddenly the professor no longer required the press of soft, insistent fingers to speed him along; Terpsichore possessed him and he gave himself over to the fury of the dance.

Whirling and leaping, Phillimore spun in madcap pirouettes that decidedly outdervished the surrounding stately mincing that his captors affected. As for those other dancers, they paused, two at a time, to mark the unexpected prodigy until, at length, only one reveler remained beside the professor to tread the measure. Sensing one another's proximity, the pair logically veered into each other's arms — and Phillimore found himself swaying cheek to jowl with a great sharp-toothed grinning lion.

And yet the frantic music carried him beyond logic; clutching the beast's golden mane and accepting its proffered upheld paw, off he stepped with redoubled vigor, dipping, dodging and delving a two-step up and down the sward. Now here, now there, the odd carousers swung with the spirit of the mirthful melody and all the world was a meld of verdant scenery whose hues bled one into another while merry watching eyes glinted and laughter mocked a counterpoint unminded by man and beast as the two, panting and sweating, scampered the precipice of a *pretissimo tutti* that blurred them to a wash of tawny tweed.

But then, too soon it seemed, the hidden consort of tympani and brass trembled on the brink of the penultimate tonic, quavered a last reluctant *ritard* before plunging, dead, into the gleeful final ejaculation of the crashing tonic chord that concluded the dithyrambic dance.

Tottering for an instant on the tips of his toes, the breathless professor toppled in temporary collapse beside the crumpled lion on the turf.

"Bravo!" shouted a single enthusiastic voice. The rest of the assemblage mingled polite condescending comments with a smattering of indifferent applause, then lost interest in the winded professor and his tired feline companion.

At length, Phillimore sat up groggily and surveyed his surroundings. He was surprised to find he sat just within the mouth

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of an immense cavern, the nature of which he'd never seen before, though he was a moderately enthusiastic amateur spelunker. Though above his head there loomed a great overhang of rock that served as the outer lip of the subterranean landscape, the ground resembled no cave he'd ever known. Instead of stone, he rested on a rolling short-cropped lea dotted with leafy orchards bearing gold and silver fruit. Nearby, a castle sported pastel pennants above the meadow; from it had proceeded the martial din and blare of the kettles and horns. A river running beside the grassy lawn spilled from the cave into the exterior wood where deep night still held sway.

Looking out into the forest, Phillimore saw an old bridge that spanned the stream. He presumed it was the one mentioned by Walter the hoarse, but there was no pale-scarlet stallion standing there waiting for the professor.

Rats! the professor grumbled to himself, glancing about in vain for his philosophic friend, Rimski, *the cat vanished, and now I'm also damn well minus pink Walter!*

Musing on Rimski reminded Phillimore that he still shared a potentially imprudent proximity with another kind of cat. He began to rise, but the lion, emitting a deep bass purr, put a paw on his shoulder and effectively restrained the professor from rising.

"All right, all right," Phillimore nervously soothed the beast, "don't worry, I'm not going anywhere!"

The lion's cold, wet nose nuzzled him. It was not a delicious tactile sensation, but the professor did his best to tolerate it. He had no desire to hurt the lion's feelings. *Wouldn't want it to be mutual.*

Just then, a man approached, the same who shouted so enthusiastically in favor of their recent choreographic display. Though Phillimore guessed him to be in his middle years, his boyish smile made him appear younger. He was of medium height with curly dark abundant hair and wore nothing but a gray toga draped loosely about his spare body and flung carelessly over one arm. His feet were bare.

Patting the big beast's head, the newcomer reassured the professor that the lion would not injure him. "He's usually harmless."

"Usually?"

"He doesn't hurt those he likes . . . and he seems to have taken quite a fancy to you." He lowered his voice. "That may prove beneficial, considering the circumstances . . ."

"What do you mean?" the professor asked, alarmed. "*What* circumstances?" He sprang smartly to his feet, a feat accomplished by virtue of the fact that the lion was temporarily transferring its affection to the second man.

"I am alluding to our hosts," said the man in the toga, indicating the other dancers, who, between sets, milled about tables laden with provender, pastries and pale punch. "They have rather a peculiar attitude towards strangers."

"Their attitude is certainly peremptory," Phillimore sourly stated, eying the company distastefully.

The group was composed of a dozen dazzling damsels dressed in pastel tutus, flesh-colored tights and slippers studded with gems, as well as a like number of sleek-haired young men in burnished military garb replete with gold braid and brass buttons. Both sexes sported jeweled circlets on their brows, indicative of their noble caste.

Hmph! Phillimore sniffed silently. *Looks like a stranded touring ballet troupe and a second-string male chorus from "The Student Prince" about to team up and perform "The Black Crook" to earn fare home!*

While Phillimore watched the fairy princes and princesses, they in turn cast covert glances in his direction. He sensed their sly disapproval.

Far from friendly.

"While you remain here," said the lion's confidant, "I don't think you're in any immediate danger."

"Well," the professor replied, "at the moment I have no intention of going anywhere until I satisfy my appetite. Or does their hostility extend to denying me access to their table?"

"Oh, they'll let you eat. Will you join me?"

"With pleasure. By the way, my name's Phillimore. Professor James Phillimore."

"Delighted to meet you," said the man in the toga, taking Phillimore by the arm and steering him to the banquet. "You may call me Andy. Come along now, best stay

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close to me."

The lion arose, stretched and yawned so that his powerful teeth and claws were prominently displayed. Then he ambled after his cherished human companions.

They sat down on the sward, Phillimore balancing an exquisitely-fashioned china plate and a crystal goblet of punch. Andy contented himself with a single silver chalice of ruby-red wine, and the lion gobbled down a succession of raw steaks.

"He is rather a remarkable beast," the professor said. "Other than in certain forms of Oriental theatre, I've never before encountered a dancing lion.

Andy nodded proudly. "I taught him all the graces. Once, he roamed the wild like any predator. But then, after we met under singular circumstances, we became fast friends, and he decided to remain with me and adopt the ways of civilization. He's since grown especially fond of diversions such as feasts and masquerades and balls. As a matter of fact, he's become much sought-after as a desirable guest by many aspiring hostesses."

"I imagine he *would* provide a certain novelty at soirees."

"Indeed, yes!" Andy averred. "During *the season*, he's a regular party lion and, don't you know, he's *always* busy." He paused to quaff some wine.

Swallowing a morsel of mutton, Phillimore brought the conversation back to the topic of his personal predicament.

"You said I'd be running no risk if I remained here, but unfortunately, I must soon be going."

"They won't let you."

"Why not?"

"They're afraid you'll try to tell their father, the king, where they've been."

So that's it! Phillimore nodded vigorously. "I believe I know all about it! The princes are under an enchantment, right?"

Andy nodded. "The exact nature of the spell has long been forgotten, but according to rumor, the curse will wind down eventually, so long as these maidens keep them company for an indefinite number of nights."

"And while they do, they dance their shoes to ruins!"

"Correct. The cobblers clamor for payment constantly and the cash drain is driving the king to distraction. He's offered substantial rewards (including marriage to any one of the young women) to whoever reveals where they go each night." Andy tossed off the rest of the wine, wiped his lips and stared sorrowfully at Phillimore. "So, you see, they'll never permit you to escape to claim the reward."

"Except that's *not* what I intend!" the professor protested. "Anyway, what *can* they do, after all, to prevent me from leaving?"

"Around here," Andy said, "they consider cutting off one's head a remarkably effective deterrent."

Just as he spoke, the professor swallowed a sip of punch. The lion solicitously pounded his back till he stopped coughing.

"Are you, too, in danger?" Phillimore asked, wiping his eyes.

"Not at all. They know I'm already married."

"You are? Where's your wife?"

"She moved out when the lion moved in."

"I can understand that," the professor said, then, smiling at the lion, quickly added, "No offense intended."

"None has been taken," Andy laughed, clapping the professor upon the shoulder. "No, no, dear fellow, I was quite aware that my spouse *might* prefer some other vicinity to that in which this lovely beast dwells." He cuddled the animal's head affectionately. "*Good boy, goo-oo-od* boy!"

"Do you think he'd stand them off if I decided to leave?" Phillimore asked, indicating the animal.

"Oh, undoubtedly he would, he's a loyal, loving lion. But the princes are trained hunters and there *arms* in the castle. I doubt if you could get very far. Even a lordly beast is not impervious to musket and ball."

The professor nodded. "True. And I wouldn't want to risk any lives, anyway. But see here, I *am* under obligation to complete a quest for a crone who won't return my property till I do. I simply *must* get going!"

"Well, you might try taking it up with the eldest princess. She pretty much decides things around here."

"Which one is she?"

"The brunette with the baggy eyes."

"I didn't notice. Baggy eyes?"

"Certainly. What can she expect? She's

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turning thirty, but never gets any sleep what with all this dancing unless she naps in the daytime — and if she does, it's not enough. She's always cranky."

"*Is that so?*" a new voice exclaimed.

They whirled about. There, hovering a few steps away, was a tall dark-haired princess with thin, stern lips, a straight patrician nose and, in truth, rather baggy eyes.

Certainly the plainest of the lot, thought Phillimore.

"How dare you speak so of me, churl?" she sneered at Andy. "If you were not of such low birth as to render your affrontery of no great significance, I should see your curly head separated this instant from your shoulders!"

The lion curled the side of its great mouth back from its great teeth and began to snarl.

"On the other hand," the princess said, "I am of generous nature, and see no real injury in remarks which, perhaps, have the seeds of truth in them, after all."

The lion sniffed disdainfully and closed its mouth and eyes. In *his* social set, such jumped-up nobility were hardly worth a yawn, and so he dismissed her from further consideration.

"You, sir," the princess addressed Phillimore, "claim to be bound on a quest that has nothing to do with our nightly revels."

"That's true," said the professor, rising respectfully. "I have an errand to perform for the witch, Baba Yaga."

"Never heard of her," the princess yawned, failing to cover her mouth as she did. "If this be true, then *why* did we discover you skulking about the woods near this enchanted spot? Was it not to learn our secret and disclose it to the king, my father?"

"Not at all!" He vigorously shook his head. "I was taking a shortcut through the forest, that was all. I didn't even see you, and *wouldn't* have, if you hadn't kidnapped me!"

The princess frowned thoughtfully. "You may, of course, be telling the truth — in which case, it is unfortunate enough. But I'm afraid however it happened, we cannot now permit you to leave."

"But I have *no* interest in wedding a princess!"

One eyebrow raised and she pursed her lips. "And why," she demanded, "should you be different from any other commoner?"

Commoner! Phillimore's temper began to boil. "I'll have you know, first off, that I am the native of a country where royalty was ousted centuries before in favor of a republic!"

"Do you speak of Rome?" Andy asked eagerly.

"No. Not quite." The professor faced the princess with elaborate dignity and hauteur. "As for marrying one of your vile lot, it *is* true I came to this world to seek a female companion, but I should never elect to settle for spoiled brats who have so little regard for human life as to condemn to execution all who'd strive for your frivolous selves!"

"I see," she said icily. "And now, speaking of the latter subject, you will permit me to retire and arrange your own imminent demise."

Swiveling sharply on one slipper, she stormed off, snapping her fingers at the first prince whose eye she caught.

"Uh-oh," Andy murmured mournfully, "*now* you've done it!"

"Yes, I'm afraid so," Phillimore concurred. "However, here's my plan..."

PHILLIMORE, ANDY and the lion sat down and waited by the side of the river, near a dock where twelve bright blue boats bounced on the billows. Andy said the princes rowed upstream each evening to pick up the twelve dancing princesses and paddle them to the vicinity of the subterranean castle.

"They *ought* to be paddled," Phillimore grumbled. "What a grim lot!"

Nearby, the sisters wrangled over the best way to terminate him. Some were in favor of drowning, some preferred simple strangulation, one foolishly suggested feeding Phillimore to the lion.

Eventually, however, Drusilla (the eldest) had her way, and traditional decapitation was agreed upon.

A company of musicians in the castle struck up a solemn march. Lackeys emerged bearing the appurtenances of a public beheading. One bore a plush cushion on which rested a gleaming

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scimitar. Another carried towels. A third's arms encircled a large, sinister wicker-basket. In the rear, the professor noticed two servants dangling between them a big black net. *Probably to throw over the lion during the ceremony.*

He stood up as the procession halted a little ways off. The thumping and blaring of the music ceased. Drusilla stepped forward.

"Are you prepared to die, stranger?" she asked haughtily.

Exchanging a look with his two friends, Phillimore addressed the eldest princess in a tone as challengingly chilly as her own. "And do you mean to tell me," he sneered, "that yours is a country so barbarous as to send off a man with so little ceremony?"

Her brows contracted and her lips turned down disdainfully. "It lacks an hour of dawn, stranger, we have no time for elaborate charades. What would you have? You've already partaken of your final meal!"

"In the civilized world, from which *I* hail," he replied with a touch of pride, "a condemned prisoner is always granted one last simple request."

She shrugged. "Time is scant. We must return to our father's castle. You'll get no special favors unless your demand is easily and speedily fulfillable."

"It is."

"Then *name* it!" the princess huffed, snapping her fingers in his face and impatiently tossing her head.

Said he, "I crave a chance of treading a final measure with this noble beast."

The lion grinned appreciatively.

Drusilla talked it over with her siblings. Though inclined to be suspicious, none of them could raise any tangible objection to the odd request, so they reluctantly agreed to permit the pair one last dance together.

"What tempo? A fast one?" Drusilla demanded.

"No, this time I should prefer a slow, measured rhythm — a ponderous quadrille, if the musicians can manage it."

"Executions are certainly becoming a bother," Drusilla sighed. "However, I'll see what they can do for you."

She strode up the hill and spoke to the conductor. He gave one knowing nod and,

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whispering to his players, signaled the downbeat.

They managed it nicely. As the band struck up a four-square strain, repetitive and compelling in its simple melody, the professor bowed to the lion. It stood on its hind legs, Phillimore put an arm about its waist, and the animal propped a paw about his; they stood side by side.

"What kind of dance position is *that?*" one of the younger sisters wondered.

"It comes from Greece," Phillimore replied. "It's known as a chain dance."

"A *chain* dance?"

"Yes. That's because more than two at a time may take part. It's possible to form a veritable chain of dancers."

"The youngest princess, a somewhat unsure little auburn-haired lass, clapped her hands enthusiastically. "Ooh, that sounds like fun!" She looked for approval to Drusilla, did not find it forthcoming, yet she did not altogether subside.

The professor said the Grecian chain dance was one of the world's great communal cultural artifacts and was quite simple to learn. With that, he and the lion stepped off deliberately with their right feet, described a large circle with their left, took a few sideways crossovers that placed them in a position to step out rightwards again, circle to the left, step-step-step, outward and circle and step-step-step and—

Andy got into position beside the dancers, placed his hand on the lion's other hip and joined the chain.

Step-step-step, outward and circle and step-step-step.

The court musicians played the slow, stately, monotonous music, repeating again and again an air that never modulated nor changed, but sang itself into the time-tapping feet of the princes and princesses who watched.

Step and step and step and outward step and circle, step and step and step and as they passed near the youngest princess, Phillimore reached out one hand invitingly toward her waist and she pranced obediently into place and stepped and stepped and stepped and took one outward step and circled with one foot and then she curved her tiny hand about the waist of her admiring opposite youngest prince and together the five danced and danced and soon it was six and then seven who stepped and stepped and stepped and took that one deliberate outward step and circled and the company grew and grew until only the frowning eldest sister, Drusilla, momentarily refused to lilt with the impelling mind-deadening refrain, but at length, even she — for she *was* after all, one of the renowned twelve dancing princesses — even she encircled the end prince's waist and led off into that outer step that was almost a foot-stamp and completed with her left foot the circle that riveted the mind to the life-bestowing earth beneath fifty-four compulsive dancing feet, stepping and stepping and stepping, over and again, and over and yet again.

The mesmerising *perpetuum mobile* communicated itself to the players of the music; enrapt, they repeated the principal subject of the piece, eyes closed, abstracted, on a plane whose pleasures are primarily known by musicians. As they tootled, keened and thumped out the swelling steady accents of the composition, the evening hours waned.

And now the central links of the chain — Phillimore, Andy and the lion — shifted their weights subtly and introduced an undulation into the great curve of dancers, a snaking ripple that billowed gently out to the furthermost ends of the line. The three repeated the maneuver a bit more forcefully, a trifle wider; again the caravan of flesh heaved to the motion.

Andy, the professor and the lion stepped wider and continued to ply the human ribbon with slowly increasing insistence. The rapt nobles coiled and contracted and dilated in fluctuating arcs that, by imperceptible degrees, carried them to the edge of the river. Their feet strutted upon the down-sloping bank and the drag and thrust of more than two dozen bodies aided the work of gravity as they footed it faster to avoid stumbling or losing the time.

Suddenly, the trio leaned into the cordon of flesh with all their weight and the professor nodded. With one mighty effort, they *snapped* the chain as hard as they could...

An unexpected melee: shouts and bewildered exclamations; twenty-four

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waking princesses and their escorts, knotted together in a complicated tangle of intertwined limbs, falling and jostling and rolling in the same direction.

"Release!"

When Phillimore shouted, he and his friends yanked their hands away from the crowd and gave mighty shoves to anyone they could reach, thus creating an effective riptide that added to the confusion. The furthest tottering royal representatives had begun to regain a little of their equilibrium but the professor's new tactic conquered whatever momentum they had started to reestablish.

With a mighty splash, half of the dazed and dizzy dancers plunged simultaneously into the river. The others either collapsed breathless by the shore or followed the bulk of the company into the water.

"Now! Hurry!" the professor yelled, but Andy and the lion were already speeding toward the docks and Phillimore matched them in a race to throw off as many mooring ropes as they could manage while the beached nobles were still too vertiginous to collect wits and combat them.

They managed to loose most of the punts before one of the princes groggily drew his sword and started uncertainly in their direction. Andy nudged the professor who turned and saw the approaching adversary. With a confirmatory nod, Phillimore and his companions scrambled into one of the two remaining boats, cast off the rope and furiously started to paddle away from the docks into the middle of the river.

The lion roared delightedly as the men rowed with all their might. Andy nodded at the beast.

"Yes, yes, I totally agree."

"What did he say?" asked Phillimore.

"That it was the best damn party in years!" He chuckled. "That was quite a dance at the end. How did you know it would work so well?"

"I didn't for sure. It was a chance I had to take. The Greek chain dance was supposed to be a public ritual in which, say, the populace of an entire town might hypnotize themselves into dancing off a cliff rather than surrender to marauders." Phillimore craned his neck around. "Look and tell me whether we're being pursued, Andy, I can't see well enough."

Andy looked. Back on the dock, the prince who'd given token chase stood in doubt for a moment as to whether to jump in the one remaining boat or hurry down to the beach and help rescue some of his floundering kinfolk. At last, with a disgusted wave of his arm, he dismissed the professor and stumbled off to yank Drusilla out of the drink.

"Row on," said Andy merrily, matching Phillimore stroke for stroke. "We're in the clear."

Overhead, the sky paled with the approaching dawn. The punt rode the crest of the river out of the cave and into the forest, through which the great flood twisted and wound.

"The bridge is one more bend downstream," said Andy. "Are you making for it?"

The professor shook his head. "I was supposed to meet Walter, my guide, there, but that was hours ago and by now, he's probably gone home, figuring I was killed on the road." He yawned. "I sure got myself stuck in one hell of a world."

"I beg your pardon?"

"Never mind, it's too complicated." He yawned again. "I'm exhausted. Just a few seconds ago, I saw a cottage over on the near shore, a little ways into the woods. I believe I'll beg a bed for a few hours before continuing my quest. Will you join me?"

"I'm afraid not," Andy replied, rowing toward the indicated river-bank. "We're on our way to town to a cotillion the lion promised to dance at."

"Do you want to use the punt?"

"No, it's not that far by foot. You keep to the river. It'll be faster for you and possibly safer than the woods."

At the bank, they stepped into the shallows and hauled the small boat onto dry land. The lion gave Phillimore a farewell hug and Andy shook hands with his new friend. Then the amiable Roman and his peculiar companion ambled down the trail and were soon lost to view...

"It's *about time* you got rid of that monster!"

The professor yelped. Jerking his head in the direction from which the unexpect-

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ed voice proceeded, he saw, sitting in a clump of weeds, the half-invisible philosopher cat.

"Rimski!"

"Nu," the cat yawned disdainfully, "you were expecting maybe Puss in Boots?"

"Some friend you are! Where've you been all night?"

"As close as I could safely come without getting trampled by those *klutzes* with ferryboats for feet! And as far away as I could stay from that overgrown alleycat's teeth!"

"You mean Andy's lion? He's harmless."

"To you, maybe." The feline padded out of the woods and deigned to rematerialize completely. "As for me, I didn't have any too sure an idea that he wouldn't've regarded me as an *hors d'oeuvre.*" Rimski rubbed appreciatively against Phillimore's legs. "Anyhow, it's good you got away safe. I'm glad to see you again."

"Likewise," said the professor, wondering whether it was proper manners to pet a former tax collector.

Rimski guided Phillimore underneath the trees to a small clearing lit by early morning sun. A neat small lawn with flagstones set in its midst beckoned the way to the tiny cottage the professor had seen from the river.

"Wait here," the cat suggested. "The men of the house will be leaving for work soon. Then you can ask for a place to lie down for a while, and when you wake, the girl will fix you a good meal before we start off again. By the way, before you snooze, maybe you could sneak me a saucer of cream? I couldn't get near the food in the cave."

"Why can't you ask for it yourself?"

"I'll be invisible in the house."

"How come?"

"In these parts," Rimski whispered, crouching behind a berry bush, "it's *tsooris* traveling with a cat. You'll be suspected of being a disguised witch and me, your familiar."

"Hmm." Phillimore mused. "And something else falls into place."

"What?"

"Is it possible that seven men live in there? Seven *small* men?"

The cat's eyes widened. "How'd you know that?"

The professor sighed. "Bit of a fey quality, I fancy."

"Fey-shmay!" the animal scoffed. "To a philosopher you shouldn't talk *kasha!*"

"We-ell, if you *really* want to know—"

But the cat, shushing Phillimore, closed his eyes for a moment and cogitated. His small whiskery lips pushed in and out thoughtfully. At length, he inclined his head knowingly and opened his eyes. "Of course . . ."

"Of course?"

"Yes," he mewed, "I think I see. Given an umbrella that whisks you to other dimensions by attunement with your thoughts, it is logical to postulate that it would tend to take you to places that correspond in some mysterious metaphysical fashion with your own mental expectations of your destinations."

"Well reasoned, Rimski," Phillimore said, impressed, "and generally correct. When I pushed the umbrella's release this time, I didn't have any clear definition of the best place to go, but I *was* thinking along the lines of what our world sometimes calls 'fairy tales.' However, I seem to have gotten more than I bargained for."

"Namely?"

The professor ticked them off on his fingers. "Baba Yaga, the Headless Horseman, Goldilocks, the Twelve Dancing Princesses, the Seven Dwarves, Andy and his Lion . . . and I suspect the island to which I am bound is none other than one which I know of in a story entitled *Beauty and the Beast!*"

"Sounds accurate, from what I've heard around Baba's place," the cat purred reflectively.

"In other words," said Phillimore, "I seem to have landed in a world of Faerie, one which may include any legend, folk tale or invented myth in my head." He groaned. "The only thing I considered at the time was fairy tale princesses; I forgot about the witches and monsters I might meet in such a place!"

"Yetz," the cat agreed, "and you didn't do so hot in the princess department, either." He ambled over to the professor

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and nudged him gently with his head. "Look, doc, you're a nice fellow, I wouldn't want you should be getting all kinds of hopes up, *f'shtay?*"

"What do you mean?"

"You can bring off this quest, maybe, with lots of luck — mainly because you've got extra data in your head from your own preconceptions of this world. So maybe you'll get Baba her black sunflower. But advice from the cat is worth a listen, *nyah?*"

"Certainly."

"All right, bhubbaley: so don't trust witches! They'll do you no good! They've got this insatiable desire for all objects of power ... and the day you get old Baba to let go your umbrella is going to be some special morning!"

"But it won't work for her. It's set on *my* mental frequency."

The cat eyed him gravely. "Even if you're dead?"

After a pause, the professor swallowed and said, "You have a point, Rimski. But look, if she doesn't give it back to me, she won't get her sunflower."

"All the same, I'd be *very* careful, if I were you," the cat warned. "And another thing — you should be glad you got rid of that *zhlub* Walter. He —"

But just then, the door to the cottage swung wide.

"He what?" Phillimore demanded. "What about Walter?"

"Shh! Not now . . . here come those dwarves!"

They waited silently while a baker's half-dozen of diminutive miners issued from the cot and trudged down the forest-path, pickaxes slung over their shoulders. Risking a peek, the professor saw the last of them stomping off. They all sang a hearty hiking song as they strode.

"Funny," Rimski ruminated, "I never heard them sing before." He waved his tail in rhythm. "Catchy little thing..."

But Phillimore did not hear him, or for that matter, the song. During the glimpse he'd taken, he spied a blithe raven-haired maiden framed in the doorway, smiling and waving at her seven protectors on their way to the mines.

She was scarce twenty, simple and unspoiled and, though her shoulders had a regal pride to their set, she emanated gentleness and good humor. Indeed, though her clear skin otherwise displayed no trace of time's encroachment, about her parted rose-pink lips were a few laugh lines, exquisite parentheses to the dainty perfection of her small, perfectly-shaped mouth.

"Come on," Rimski said, "Let's go before she closes the door. What's the *matter* with you?"

"I think," said the professor in a faint voice, "that I just fell in love!"

The chubby cat rolled his eyes heavenwards, made a derisive sound like a razzberry and disgustedly disappeared.

SAILING INTO the graceful harbor, Phillimore steered just north of windward, dipped his oar and impelled the punt toward the doming crest that was the nearest shore.

It was a beach of spun-sugar sand that rolled gently back and upward to a small hill but lightly downed with early spring grasses. The island itself put out two peninsular projections to either side of the bay, tame curvets of land that circled so far around the water they nearly enclosed the flood and made it a lagoon. But not quite; the waters opened to the sea and Phillimore, having negotiated the narrow gap, drove steadily onward till the punt scraped lightly on the rising floor of the bay. He got out and pulled the craft upon the beach, shipped the oar, then trotted off toward the neighboring hillside.

All was silent, all was calm. The perfumed breeze bore a hint of lush tropic vegetation, but mostly the air was thin and fresh as the world's primal morning. Somewhere overhead caroled a lark of paradise.

Phillimore's feet printed their trail in the pristine sand. At length he left the beach and trod lightly on the dewy ground out of which sparse blades of grass thrust up here and there. The hill was close now and he quickened his pace to reach it. As he did, he cast about for some trail cresting the rise, but could find none.

Then he saw a little ways up from the

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level of the ground, a darkness in the hummock of earth. Approaching, he identified it as a cave, not very large, sunk into the hill. Memories of the lair of the purple troll, a dreadful creature in one of his earlier adventures, flooded into his mind; he tarried his pace, reluctant now to proceed further...

But he had no choice. Without warning, the gentle clime darkened and the wind quickened to howling gale force. All, all was sham, and the seeming-pleasant harbor was an evil lure. Lightning flickered in the lowering sky, the lark changed to a bird of night, croaking dire instances of death. He tried to turn and make good his escape, but the bare earth suddenly sprouted noisome growths everywhere, stinking twines and vines that corded about his ankles and rooted him fast.

The ground tilted; the creepers released his legs and he slid, slowly at first, then with nightmare acceleration, directly toward the hill that now was a twisted, malevolent mountain. The cave's edges shivered and altered, and its perimeter now was a jagged saw-toothed mouth that dilated to a wide cavern then irised tight, becoming a puckered channel of death. Phillimore flailed his arms to wrest free of the danger, but his efforts were useless. Doom hurtled closer; the world gaped and devoured him and he screamed as he felt the prickling of a million teeth and he woke on the floor in the middle of a rug whose harsh weave scratched him all over.

He sat up and blinked at the brightness of late afternoon sunlight. Memory returned: he was in the home of the seven dwarves-where the elfin maiden had treated him kindly, preparing him breakfast, putting him to rest in her own bedroom, where he'd suffered the nightmare and tumbled out of bed in the process. But as he thought of her, the terror fled and his heart fluttered with the flame of his infatuation.

Phillimore noticed a movement in the corner of the room. Turning, he saw the cat, Rimski, seated in front of a mirror, half-invisible. As he watched, the animal faded repeatedly in and out of sight.

"What *are* you doing?" the professor asked, getting to his feet.

Rimski abruptly zapped into focus. "Well, it's about time you woke!" he purred. "You've been asleep all day."

"I needed the rest," said the professor. "What were you doing just now?"

"Doing?" the cat echoed, somewhat embarrassed.

"Appearing, disappearing, coming back and vanishing again." Suddenly the man grinned. "*I* know what you were trying to accomplish!"

"What?" Rimski asked surlily.

"You were attempting to fade out of sight while leaving your grin behind!"

"Nonsense," the cat grumped, looking deeply wounded. "Why would I do anything so meretricious?"

But before Phillimore could reply, an anguished shriek froze them both.

The professor's face went white. "It's her! She's in trouble!"

"Brilliant deduction," the cat yowled, darting toward the door. "Stop jawing and *move!*"

Needing no second hint, Phillimore shot out of the bedroom and clomped toward the stairway that led down to the rustic ground-floor kitchen, nearly stepping on Rimski's tail as he did.

The kitchen was a large cheery place bedecked with flowers and lacy curtains. In the middle, a great iron stove stood and at the side hung a big pot of heating water, suspended over an enormous hearth. Snow White evidently had just begun dinner preparations.

Thundering downstairs, Phillimore missed his footing and tumbleshot the landing. He skidded into the kitchen, Rimski right behind. Fortunately for the professor's seat, the kitchen floor was stone, unlike the thick-grain lumber in the rest of the house.

Snow White was at the far end of the room, near the vestibule to the outer door. Her dainty hands clutched at her throat and breast, and as they watched; dismayed, she sank into a swoon. Phillimore managed to hurl himself forward and catch her before her head hit the flagging.

Rimski sniffed nervously at her. "I think she's dead," he said mournfully. "Let's get

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out of here before the dwarves return!"

"No!" Phillimore snapped. "Control yourself. It's something she ate. I can save her!" He lofted her in his arms, fumbled the constraints at her waist loose and quickly untied the ribbon circling her slender neck. Then he joggled her into the proper first aid attitude and jounced her till a morsel of poisoned fruit dislodged itself and fell from her lips.

No sooner did it escape than her eyelids fluttered. "What happened?" she asked faintly as Phillimore eased her to a sitting position.

Said the cat: "What happened is that my friend here just saved your life!" He eyed the professor curiously. "I assume you knew that she was choking in the usual manner?"

Phillimore nodded. But Snow White, fetching a napkin to clean up the expelled foodstuff, wondered, "What other way is there to choke?"

"Not what I meant," said Rimski, "forget it."

"Ah, how *can* I forget that this noble sire hath rescued me from the wiles of the wicked witch?"

"*Veys mir,*" the cat groaned, "that's what I was afraid of!"

Quickly, she explained how a decrepit peddler woman had, a few moments earlier, duped her into accepting a gift of fresh fruit and how, upon taking a single bite, her throat had closed in on her and her heart pounded rapidly. "Before I knew it," said Snow White, "the world spun about me giddily . . . and then naught else can I remember till you, good noble gentleman, restored me to life." Demurely, she stepped up to Phillimore and, with downcast eyes, shyly murmured, "If thou wouldst treasure one so lowly as I, then but say so, sire, and I am yours."

Phillimore took her into his arms and tried to express his love in rapturous phrases. But just then, the door burst open. The professor, the maiden and the cat swiveled about to learn what manner of intrusion this new event might be.

When Rimski saw the newcomer, he instantly popped out of sight.

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The crone was stout and whisker-lipped, with one baleful yellow eye peeping out of a thatch of dry-straw hair. Cloaked all in black, with a hood over her head and a basket upon her arm, she was unmistakably the peddler-witch of Snow White's recent peril and Phillimore's hallowed memories.

The witch was not in a good mood.

"Swine prince of toads!" she hissed, pointing a bony finger at the professor. "How *dare* you interfere in the purposes of a queen?"

Phillimore shrugged off-handedly. "Probably because I'm a Democrat." He eyed the kettle in the corner speculatively. Meanwhile, Snow White, trembling like a frightened hind, snuggled against her protector.

"Mortal, you do not even display proper obeisance. I shall make you suffer!"

"Possibly," he replied, tenderly extricating himself from the girl's grasp, "but at the moment, I suspect I have you at a bit of a disadvantage." He took three rapid strides toward the hearth, grabbed a pair of pot-shields and hefted the full kettle from the flames. *Wonder whether Baum's remedy works on all witches?*

The horrible crone blanched when she saw the vessel of water. Skipping back as fast as possible, she waved an imperious hand at the front door, which gaped wide at her magical command. On the threshhold she paused long enough to warn Phillimore in dire tones to stay out of her way — if he could.

"Just try!" she cackled. "But I'll get you ..." She glowered at Snow White. "You, too, my pretty!" The witch stared at an empty spot in the living-room. "And that goes for your little cat, too!"

The invisible Rimski meowed miserably.

A loud burst of thunder shook the cottage, though the day was bright and sunny. In the midst of the hurly-burly, the witch vanished, leaving behind a noxious yellow cloud of billowing-sulphur.

"My hero!" Snow White cried, flinging herself into Phillimore's arms. Wheezing from the sorcerous pollution, he hugged her with avuncular affection, surprised that such unaccustomed feminine propinquity stirred so little libidinous personal response.

Must be the stress of the moment, he reasoned silently, gazing down fondly at her transcendentally-lovely visage.

"Let's get the hell out of here — *fast!*" the cat advised. "The first thing we should do is put distance between us and this cottage. Make her chase after us. Here we're easy game!"

"But you must not abandon me!" Snow White begged, clutching the professor's lapels. He patted her reassuringly.

"I meant all of us!" the animal yelped.

"But how can I leave my dear friends, the dwarves, without even saying goodbye to them?"

"They'll be safer, I suspect," said Phillimore, "without our presence. Best leave them a note."

"Make it a short one!" Rimski pleaded.

"Yes, yes," the man reassured the animal, "we'd all better move our tails."

The idiom greatly puzzled the cat.

After she jotted a terse missive to her diminutive friends, Snow White packed a basket of food, threw a shawl over her slender shoulders, affixed the letter to the front door and shut it fast. Though she longed to hear the particulars of her new protector's history — and especially how he happened to travel with a sometimes-invisible cat — the maiden spared them her curiosity and hurried with Phillimore and Rimski to the water's edge.

"Using the punt," said Phillimore, "we can cover a great deal of distance yet before it grows dark."

But their escape plans were foiled. A great cleft in the small boat had somehow materialized since last he'd ridden in it. The gap was so wide, the punt was nearly shorn in two.

"How did this happen?" Phillimore groaned.

"The witch must've done it," Rimski mewed dourly. "You sure had to go make one powerful enemy, *tovarich.*"

The professor shrugged hopelessly. "If I had my umbrella, I could save us all, but there's no chance of that now. Two witches

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to worry about . . . one I can't satisfy unless I complete her damned quest. The other will get me if I *try*. If only I'd met Walter when I was supposed to!"

"As for him," said Rimski, "put Walter out of your mind. He doesn't deserve trust."

"Why not?"

"Baba Yaga has him under an enchantment. He's wholly devoted to doing her will. He's a mathologic animal."

Phillimore blinked. "I beg your pardon?"

"I said he's mathologic."

"Don't you mean mythologic?"

"Nope. Mathologic. You can't count on him."

Snow White, impatiently enduring the conversation, decided to get things back to more immediate practicalities. "What are we supposed to do now? How shall you save me, mighty champion?"

"Well," Phillimore drawled, shifting uncomfortably from one foot to the other, "I suppose we have no choice but to hoof it from here."

Snow White opened her sparkling eyes wide. "In sooth, do you expect me to destroy my dainty feet hiking?"

Rimski interrupted. "Let's hide in the woods tonight. There's a ferry due six miles upstream, but it won't come till tomorrow morning. I know a fairy ring where we'll be safe this evening."

"Okay," answered the professor. "We'll catch up on some needed sleep."

"Hmmf," the cat sniffed, "you've been snoozing all day."

"And I'm sure I'll need a lot more rest before this adventure's done."

They started off for the enchanted clearing and reached it soon after dark. The professor bundled up his jacket for Snow White to rest her head on.

The night passed without incident, but Phillimore didn't get much sleep, after all. Snow White kept him awake for hours asking him questions.

RISING EARLY in the morning, the three companions made a hasty breakfast from Snow White's basket of goodies, then briskly proceeded along the water's edge to the spot where Rimski claimed the ferry would moor.

Arriving at a rude wooden dock, the cat and the man sat upon the blanched sand to await the vessel. Meanwhile, Snow White, trilling merrily like some lark of the morning, scouted the perimeter of the woods for berries.

The shingle sparkled in the morning light. Phillimore was pleased to see an absence of civilization's litter in the cool dawning vista. Scanning the opposite shore, he noted a cluster of cottages. Rimski explained they were close to the capital, and the tiny houses marked the edge of the suburbs.

No sound but the breeze's breath ruffled them. Snow White gamboled hide-and-seek around the boles and branches of the forest until Phillimore tired of following her blithe form dancing midst bush and bramble. The morning lulled him; all danger seemed remote, all travail transient; he wondered on the arbitrariness of Meaning...

"Excuse me, is this where the ferry docks?"

The lilting voice at his elbow startled him, half-asleep as he was. He turned, surprised, having heard no footsteps — and there before him stood the most serenly beautiful blonde he'd ever been privileged to view. Tall she was, regal in bearing without any trace of hauteur; wide blue orbs twinkled mischievously in an oval heart-face whose creamy skin was draped and caressed by long gold tresses. The woman was clad in gossamer green and carried a sparkling emerald diadem in one hand. Upon her feet she wore an exquisitely-fashioned pair of pure crystal slippers.

"I said, *is* this where I catch the ferry?" The damsel spoke in a mellow, throaty tone that tingled Phillimore's spine.

"Yes, it is," he replied. "Will you sit and wait with us?"

"In a minute," she promised, striding off to inspect the horizon where the river kissed the sky. But she only took a few steps when she tottered. Uttering a startlingly earthy imprecation, she hobbled to the dock, leaned against a piling and

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yanked off one of her slippers. "Damn," she grumbled, massaging her foot, "these things are sure hell on the arches!"

"Women," Rimski sneered. "They kill themselves in the name of Fashion."

"It's not *my* fault," she retorted. "Designers never consider how our feet will feel when they come up with their latest torture devices." She held the shoe up to the light and squinted at it. "Of course, this *is* rather a fetching number." She inverted the slipper, dumped a quantity of sand out of it, then put it back on and repeated the business with the other.

"I presume," said the professor, "that you are none other than Cinderella?"

"And what if I am?" she demanded, glancing at him suspiciously. "Are you one of the prince's spies?"

"Hardly. I'm just curious. I associate glass slippers with Cinderella."

"Who doesn't?" the blonde sighed. "Ever since I crashed that lousy Grand Ball, glass slippers have been *the* thing. You can't buy a simple pair of sensible shlumpfing-around-in shoes anyplace!"

"So," Rimski purred, regarding her with mild interest, "you're the famous Princess Cinderella?"

"Not any more, catnik! I've had it with that royal bum!" Her mouth described a disgusting moue. Wetting her lips, she looked out for the ferry but, failing to see it, left the dock and sat down by the professor's side.

Phillimore, slightly shocked, asked, "Are you saying that you left the prince?"

"You bet your bird I did!"

He winced at her colorful argot, but then he realized he must make allowances for the fact that, after all, she *had* started as a chimney-sweep and must be expected to have carried some of her formatory earthiness with her when she attained the exalted rank of princess. It dismayed him, though, that one of his favorite childhood stories had somewhat not managed to end happily ever after...

He expressed his feelings in so many words and urged Cinderella to confide in him.

"Don't call me Cinderella," she said, placing a hand on his. "Only my stepmother and her lousy daughters like to tack on the 'cinder' part. I'm *Ella*, but you can call me Ellie." With that, she smiled at Phillimore with the kind of vague unspoken promise that is the natural province only of the most innocent or the most flirtatious of women.

The press of her hand on his caused Phillimore's pulse to beat in rapid syncopation that, paradoxically, lulled his critical faculties to sleep.

"Why *have* you left the prince?" he asked, holding onto her dainty hand.

"He's not the man I married." She sighed. "Godmother knows, I should've seen the signs sooner, it was obvious enough. But I was too infatuated."

"*Nu?*" the cat prompted impatiently. "What did you learn about him?" The professor gestured for Rimski to be silent.

Ella leaned her head conspiratorially close. "It was the slipper business. I lost one of them at the Grand Ball."

"Yes, I've heard about that," Phillimore nodded. "In order to find you, the prince said he'd have the slipper tried on the feet of all the eligible maidens in the land and he sent out a messenger to —"

"Messenger, hell!" Ella interrupted. "He went himself!"

"I beg your pardon?" The professor was confused.

"The prince personally tried the glass slipper on all the eligible women of the land. That should have clued me in!"

"To what?"

"That he's got a foot fetish."

"ALL 'BOARD!"

The handsome young skipper called out lustily as the last of the arriving passengers disembarked. The ferry was a paddle-wheeler gaily bedecked with bunting, reminiscent of a Nineteenth Century Mississippi riverboat.

Phillimore, Ella, Rimski and Snow White were the only passengers getting on at the quay. Ella walked a bit ahead, hiking up her gossamer gown so it would not trail in the splashes or get caught on the splinters of the ramp. She was at the moment deliber-

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ately holding herself aloof from the others, shoulders high and proud. The cause of her chilly attitude was Snow White's seemingly innocent query, upon being introduced to the ex-princess, as to "what mode of alchemy accomplished the striking paleness of yon cornsilk tresses?"

Rimski trotted after Ella. Phillimore brought up the rear, his arm firmly linked to Snow White's own and securely held there by her delicate little fist. As they stepped on the gang, he looked up and saw Ella at the top rearranging her skirts in such fashion as to twitch them aside for one immodest, fleeting glimpse of tapered thigh.

"Ah, sweet champion," Snow White sweetly suggested through clenched teeth, "pay heed to thine own legs lest they unwittingly deposit thee in yon river . . ." To underscore her loving advice, she gently punctuated her *caveat* with an educational hip-nudge that instructionally introduced his bread-basket to the handrail of the gangway.

"OOF!"

Though his sole monosyllabic utterance hardly shed light on his views of Snow White's pedagogic pretensions, mentally he observed that her rustic lack of breeding *ought* to be taken into account. Also, he noted his ego *ought* to be flattered by what might be construed as jealousy on her part. Yet these silent considerations held little persuasive force compared with his need to negotiate the remaining segment of gangway in a posture reminiscent of a Groucho Marx sidle.

And yet . . . and yet . . . Snow White is SO lovely . . .

A real ornament.

They all sat down together, Ella on a bench just opposite and across from James Phillimore.

The lines were loosed, the ferry slipped into the current, and soon the captain left the pilot-house to greet his passengers.

The skipper was a sun-bronzed youth of perhaps twenty-two or -three. Sinewy and skinny, he seemed all angles. His long ruggedly good-looking face included a lantern-jaw and enormous handlebar moustache, and when he grinned, he flashed a gold incisor. His eyes were steely blue that matched a uniform studded with brass buttons. On his head perched a visored cap. To the professor, he resembled the sort of riverboat pilot one reads about in Twain or Ferber. Phillimore was astonished to hear him speak in a recognizable southern U.S. drawl.

"Ah'm Cap'n Mike," he introduced himself. "Jes' make yourselves comf't'ble and tell me what we can do t' make yer ride *fun.*" He grinned; his tooth glinted. "And what's yer name, li'l lady?"

Snow White blushed, curtsied and told him. Ella complied with a similar request, but with no personal confusion and without getting up. The professor introduced Cap'n Mike to Rimski and gave his own name. As soon as he spoke, the seaman squinted curiously and asked whether he might hail from the "Yewnited States."

When Phillimore avowed that he did, the captain pounded him on the back so heartily that the professor dropped Snow White's basket.

"Ah'll be hawg-tied and double-damned! Yer the fust Yankee I set eyes on in a coon's age!" With that, he pumped Phillimore's hand so hard he might have been priming for oil. "That's the sperret, son! Put 'er there! What brings you all th' way over t' here?"

Phillimore started to explain, but Rimski pressed his lips together and gave a frowning shake of the head. He stemmed his tale in mid-tide.

"Got a secret, huh?" Cap'n Mike asked with a sage nod. " 'S okay, son! You won't find a closer ear ner a firmer hand for a fellow countryman, even if ye do be a Yankee!" He grinned again, but the professor demurred from closer discussion. The sailor shrugged. "It's yer hand, Jimmy-boy; if you wanna play close t' the vest, that's your privilege, but if yer running from trouble, feel free t' change yer mind."

With that, he bowed deeply to Snow White and invited her to accompany him to the wheel-house where he would allow

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her to steer the ferry. She demurely dimpled at him and said she would join him presently.

Phillimore frowned.

"Rimski," the professor said once Cap'n Mike was gone, "why did you shake your head before? What harm would there be in telling the captain our troubles?"

The feline preened as he spoke, pleased that the professor took his word as sterling. "He *may* be harmless, but . . . he's a bit nosey for my taste. And he volunteered his assistance a little too quickly, don't you think?"

Before Phillimore could reply, Snow White interrupted huffily. "How canst thou suspicion such a one? To scan his visage is to know his mind!"

Rimski grunted. "I'm sure your opinion counts, Snow-baby. But remember, the queen has spies everywhere!"

"Nonsense, cat! She could never suborn such a specimen! He hath sparkling blue eyes! How canst *not* trust him?"

The professor's own orbs sought the heavens in unspoken exasperation. Then he turned to Ella. "What was *your* opinion of the skipper?"

Brushing a wayward strand of blonde hair into place, Ella made a *who-knows?* gesture with one hand and smiled at Phillimore. "I believe he's too straightforward to worry about," she said. "Of course, if he *were* in the employ of our neighborly witch-queen, he might well affect that bluff, hearty manner. But we *must* take into account what this raven-haired maiden has brought in evidence."

Snow White was delighted to have her views apparently confirmed from a quarter where she least expected an ally. She smiled at Ella and asked, "Then you agree that our skipper is too divine to be in any way suspect?"

"Dear child," the other sweetly answered, "you completely mistake my meaning. I meant to call notice to the fact that he paid you a good deal of attention. Now if he's *that* undiscerning, how can anyone credit him with sufficient brains to be duplicitous?"

Snow White jumped to her feet, fury blazing scarlet in her cheeks. She glowered at Phillimore. "Dost thou sufferest this low person to address *me* — thine own beloved — *thus?*"

"Uh . . ." the professor stammered. "Let's . . . let's not have a scene, ladies . . ."

The angry girl began to frame a scathing reply, but then waved Phillimore away with one disgusted gesture and confronted the blonde, instead.

"I warn thee, strumpet, from now on thou'd best keep a civil tongue in thy head."

Ella rose slowly, pushing back her sleeves. "You better watch how you talk to an ex-princess, junior!"

"Ex-princess?" Snow White laughed. "*You?* Your origins proclaim you, plain enough! Ignoble scullery wench!"

"Now that's enough!" Phillimore begged. "Both of you, calm down!"

But his suggestion was not acknowledged. The disputants, incensed beyond words, threw themselves at one another, pinching, slapping, yanking hair, squealing and caterwauling sufficiently to make the professor cringe and the cat wince.

"Let's step aside," Rimski suggested, scuttling out of the path of one of Ella's slippers, which scudded across the deck to smash to bits against a recumbent anchor. "The true philosopher finds it prudent to observe all such phenomena from an objective distance."

Phillimore joined him by a bulkhead, pausing only to dodge a wild roundhouse that went wide of Ella's midriff. "And what moral precepts are you able to derive from a study of the present phenomenon?"

"That I'd rather be a cat than married," Rimski replied fervently.

The brouhaha brought the captain on deck.

"What in tarnation is —?" He stopped, cognizant all of a sudden of the source of the ruckus.

"A minor difference of opinion," meowed the cat as Snow White tugged a quantity of hair from her opponent's skull and uttered a triumphant exclamation:

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"Dark roots! What did I tell you?"

Ella neatly rebutted her opponent's argumentation by butting her opponent. The tactic did not daunt the younger woman, though; she smartly advanced the issue of balled fist against jutting chin. Ella switched techniques at that stage and shredded Snow White's logic with a systematic tattering of her outer garments.

Cap'n Mike joined Phillimore by the bulkhead.

"I suppose we should do something," the professor remarked.

"I dunno," said the sailor, obviously enjoying the pyrotechnics of distaff debate.

"But oughtn't we try to part them?"

"Are you itchin' to step in between them hellcats?"

"Well," Phillimore sighed, "I guess they will wear each other out eventually."

"Or kill themselves," Rimski yawned.

But the tussle ended sooner than any of the observers anticipated, and in an unexpected manner.

The men were facing starboard, so did not immediately see the reason for the sudden diplomatic detente. The women, during a brief pause to catch breath, happened to glance out off the port rail.

Their combined screech set the cat's hair on end.

"What in hell's wrong?" Mike swore. By way of reply, the women pointed to the river portside. The men and Rimski followed their trembling fingers and spied, at a distance of perhaps forty yards, a huge and surprisingly unappealing fresh-water serpent churning up the surface in a pell-mell rush towards the ship.

"Aww, grape-shot and gopher-guts!" the captain grumped. "It's gonna be one o' them kind-a days!"

With that, he rushed into the wheelhouse.

Rimski mewed miserably. "Either the skipper's a coward, or he set this all up." He huddled against Phillimore's pants-leg.

The women hunkered down under one of the benches; in spite of their recent enmity, they clasped one another tightly.

"Ah, dear champion," said Snow White to the professor, "wilt thou protect me 'gainst yon fell beast?"

"D-ditto with n-n-nuts on top!" Ella stammered.

"Quit nagging," Phillimore replied. "Rimski, what *is* that thing?"

"Looks like Nessie."

"Nessie? From Scotland?!"

"The same."

"But what's he doing *here?"*

"I imagine," the cat answered, "that the witch-queen sent him."

The man gave a low whistle. "She *does* play rough."

As if to punctuate the sentiment, the creature uncoiled itself until its head was perhaps twenty feet above the surface of the water and roared like an iron foundry at rush-hour.

"Chuttarachmaunca!" Rimski moaned, blanching beneath his shaggy gray coat. "We're doomed!"

"Buck up," Phillimore said. "I'll reason with him."

The cat looked at him as if he'd gone mad.

Phillimore didn't feel especially courageous, but knew someone had to refuse to give in to panic. *Maybe I can stall for time?*

Actually, the monster wasn't quite as dreadful as the purple troll of an earlier adventure. Phillimore hoped that the serpent's vast bulk was not commensurate with a like quantity of intelligence . . .

As the water-worm hove into view some fifteen yards from the ship's rail, Phillimore held up one hand like a traffic cop and said in a stern voice, "HOLD IT, NESSIE! LET'S SEE YOUR LICENSE!"

The beast stopped short, raised its head another few feet above the surface and fixed Phillimore frostily with an immense yellow eye.

"Lee-cense?" it growled in a deep fortissimo *burr.* "I ken nae lee-cense! Wha' dostha jabber about, mon?"

"I asked for your lee- . . . for your license!" The professor employed his sternest *where-is-your-term-paper?* tone and snapped his fingers impatiently. "Come, come, produce your license at once, Nes-

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sie! If you don't have it, prepare to tread water all the way back to Scotland!"

The threat was so unexpected that Nessie actually retreated an inch, eyes wide at the cool air of authority projected by the insignificant mite. But then the serpent remembered he was on queen's business. Bringing more coils out of the water, he used the additional yardage to crane his head down level with the professor's.

"Lee-cense?" it repeated, fixing the man with a baleful glare. "I say I ken nae lee-cense! Lee-cense for *wha'?*"

Phillimore crossed his arms and insolently returned Nessie's glower. *Look for a bare spot!* he thought, remembering that dragons and serpents often have a single unprotected patch where they can be assailed. Not that Phillimore had any weapon handy. *Doesn't matter, anyhow,* he told himself, examining the body of the monster in vain for a place without a protective layer of scales. Its neck was covered with scarlet wedges like overgrown armadillo-plate; its breast was similarly protected, though there the shingles were a dull amber in hue.

"Lee-cense for wha'?" it demanded once more.

"Attack and despoilment!" Phillimore replied. "You can't wreck ferries out of season without the proper papers!"

"Really?" Nessie asked, non-plussed. "Truly, lad," he grumbled, lifting another fourteen feet of his gargantuan body from the river-bottom, "I dinna ken ta local customs!"

"Oh, ay," the professor nodded sagely, "ask anyone, you'll discover I'm telling the truth . . ."

"And I'll jus' do tha' richt na', I weel," the monster replied, suddenly diving below the surface — but not before Phillimore glimpsed a tiny spot near its belly that was berefit of scaly protection.

As soon as Nessie disappeared, Cap'n Mike popped his head out of the wheelhouse and cursed roundly.

"Dawg-bone double-damn!" he shouted. "Ah had 'im in mah sights! Whyn'tchoo keep 'im talkin' another couple seconds?"

The professor shot a dirty look at the tar, but before he could frame an appropriate rejoinder, a perfect geyser of water boiled up from the river not five feet away from the port railing. Phillimore gestured toward the disturbance. "Well, as for that, skipper, I believe you're about to get a second chance."

The captain immediately ducked back into the wheel-house.

Out of the water stormed a livid Nessie, the pale yellow glow of his enormous eyes now flecked with a dangerous shade of scarlet.

"Varlet!" he roared. "How dast-tha trifle wi' me? There's no such thing as thy lee-cense!"

"Says who?"

"Says all t' denizens below! I consulted with a school o' eminent sturgeons, and nane e'er heerd-a sich a ridiculous thing!"

"Bosh!" Phillimore bluffed. "How can you take their word for it? What do *they* know about topside regulations? Are you trying to defy authority with this fishy tale?"

"Och, I've had well enow!" the monster bellowed. "Tha queen hast commanded me t' wreck this vessel, an' wreck it I shall, lee-cense or no lee-cense! If there be aught i' the way o' a fine, the dame hersel' can richt well assume t' debt!"

Further parlay was useless. Nessie rose as far out of the water as was serpently possible, emitting an ear-splitting screech in the process. Phillimore hurled himself beneath the bench where the ladies still quavered with fright.

"Maybe we'd do better overboard!" he yelled at them, but the monster's mighty bellow drowned him out.

Rearing back with his massive skull, Nessie gave the ferry a powerful ram that set the ship rocking sickeningly — though it managed not to founder. With a playful snort, the serpent butted the side of the vessel a second time, obviously toying with it before its final onslaught.

Phillimore clung desperately to the bench, which from underneath, was solidly fastened to the deck planking. With one hand, he cushioned Rimski against his

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side. The cat nervously flexed its claws to the detriment of the professor's epidermis.

The two women's mouths were open, but it was impossible to hear them screaming. The river crashed over all the passengers as the ferry rocked from port to starboard to port, righting itself only to yaw in a decidedly alarming fashion.

In the midst of the turmoil and artificial tempest, Phillimore cast one desperate glance aft. To his surprise, the captain, who he'd written off as a hopeless craven, straddled the port rail with his long legs and aimed a rifle at the rampaging Nessie.

Not a chance, thought Phillimore, deciding that the very desperation of their plight must have lent Cap'n Mike the courage of a raging berserker. But with the pitching ship threatening to broach-to any second, and with the lake monster vulnerable only in one minute patch, *and* with the target in violent motion, it was clear that the skipper hadn't the slimmest chance of —

CRACK!

When the boiling whirlpool swallowed up the dead fresh-water serpent and the captain maneuvered the ferry out of danger of being sucked down with the creature, and only when the deck-surface returned to a reasonable facsimile of an horizontal plane, Rimski agreed to stop burrowing his whiskers in the professor's belly.

"What happened?" the cat mewed, still terrified.

Phillimore petted him to reassure Rimski he was no longer in danger. (He still felt peculiar about lavishing affection on a one-time tax collector. Somehow, it seemed a trifle *gauche).*

"What happened," said Snow White with adulation nestling in her every syllable, "is that yon brave seaman hath rid us of the dastardly demon!"

"Shucks," said Cap'n Mike, "twarn't nothin', ma'am."

"Well," the blonde ex-princess Ella admitted, "it *was* a lucky shot. But the greatest bravery was shown, I ween, when this dear man —" (here she put her arm in Phillimore's) "— when this dear man, I say, faced the creature and gave the skipper the opportunity of locating Nessie's one weak point, which, by happy fortune, he *managed to penetrate with a single bullet."*

"Fortune?" the captain fumed. "By chance? Gol' dang it, ma'am! Don't yew know crack marksmanship when y' sees it? *Luck* my Aunt Nellie's aspadistra!"

Something at that moment clicked in Phillimore's memory. Pointing to the skipper, he blurted out in a positive voice: "Fink!"

The captain squinted suspiciously. "Who y' callin' a fink?"

"Aren't you *Mike Fink?"*

The other displayed his gold tooth in a broad grin. "Y' mean y' heard o' me, chum?"

"I should say I have! The best sharpshooter on the Mississippi river! One of the greatest folk heroes of the American midwest!"

Mike Fink turned scarlet to the tips of his hair. "Aw, shucks, y' shouldn't ought-a say them things."

"But they're true!"

"Waal, *shore* they are! But they still put th' flush on a man's face, right 'nough . . ."

Now that the captain's identity was firmly affixed, Phillimore was able to assure Rimski that they couldn't hope for a better ally than Mike Fink. The cat was still skeptical, but considering the accuracy of the skipper's shooting, decided to accept the new companion for the time being. As for Snow White, she literally clung to the tall man's sleeve. There was no doubt she'd totally switched allegiance to a new champion.

"Never mind," Ella whispered to Phillimore, *"you* don't need a schoolgirl! *You* deserve a maturer mate . . ."

The professor shrugged. *Some gentlemen DO prefer blondes, I suppose.*

They quickly described to Fink their plight in reference to the witch-queen and Phillimore also outlined his quest for Baba Yaga's black sunflower. When he was finished, the captain clapped him on the back.

"Two witches!" the stringy sailor exclaimed. "You are sure one Yank with

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more troubles than a possum in a kettle o' pot likker! Well, we just gonna hafta cancel th' ol' ferry run for a time an' see you-all get hold of that l'il ol' sun flower safely."

"Thanks," the professor said, heartily shaking his hand, "that'll be an enormous help, if you can pilot me to the enchanted island." He turned to Rimski. "Can you tell the captain how to get there?"

The cat shook his head. "No, and neither could Walter, if he were here."

"But Walter said he guided the other searchers there."

"He did. But that wouldn't make any difference."

"Why not?"

"The island is enchanted, remember?" the cat explained. "It moves around."

"Oh, terrific!" Phillimore groaned. "How do we catch up with it?"

"By consulting a magic atlas."

"And where do we get one of them?"

"In a magic library, shmendrick!" Rimski yelped, his patience at an end. "Where did you think?"

Cap'n Mike broke in. "There's a castle just upstream that I hear tell has a bookroom like what y' need. I often shuttle visiting sorcerers over thataway."

"Sounds like the right kind of place," Phillimore nodded.

"Only one thing," said the skipper. "It ain't the safest place, I hear, t' fetch a visit on."

The professor sighed deeply.

"I'm delighted to hear that," he murmured. "I was so afraid life might begin to grow dull . . ." ●

Marvin Kaye

Marvin Kaye was born in Philadelphia, studied theater and English lit at Penn State, came to New York in the 60's to act, direct and write plays. He got diverted into trade journalism and newspaper work. Then in 1970, he began as a fulltime freelance writer to create mystery novels and non-fiction books.

He has collected fantasy literature since his teens, and started seriously writing SF and fantasy several years ago. First efforts were for paperback anthologies in 1975: "Fiends and Creatures" and "Brother Theodore's Chamber of Horrors." Since then, he has written "The Masters of Solitude" (with Park Godwin) and "The Incredible Umbrella," the latter of which was serialized in *Fantastic* and is forthcoming in a *Dell* paperback edition in 1980, having been published in hardcover by *Doubleday*. "The Amorous Umbrella" excerpted in this issue is a sequel to "Incredible," and will be published in its full form by *Doubleday* in 1981.

The character James Phillimore in the "Umbrella" stories is rather a self-parody of the author, especially with regard to his pedantic bent; also his alma mater, Parker College, which bears a striking resemblance and similar location to Penn State.

Other books by Kaye include: (mysteries) "Bullets for Macbeth", "My Son, the Druggist," etc.; (non-fiction) "A Toy is Born," "The Handbook of Mental Magic," etc.

He is currently working on a short story collection of fantasy for *Doubleday*. Also, this past year he has been teaching a science-fantasy workshop at NYU.

WHY WE CHOSE THIS STORY

Marvin Kaye and his delightful umbrella have been longtime favorites of fantasy readers, and particular friends of ours, "The Incredible Umbrella" having appeared in the Feb. 1976 and June 1977 issues of Fantastic.

So we were delighted to have the opportunity to preview his forthcoming book. "The Amorous Umbrella" takes its hero, James Phillimore on a romp through the world of folklore—both old European and American tall tales—and shows us the power those stories still hold for twentieth century imaginations.

Unexpected turns of plot, familiar characters with new twists, a wonderful sense of humor. . Who could resist such a story?

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EVERY CORNER of the room filled up with black hair. Then the caterpillars started crawling through it and Gorman saw that the hair was growing out of the worms like infinitely complex arabesques. Some of them had very pretty red and green eyes, and he found the intricacy of the mandibles extremely interesting. In fact, Gorman found all of this extremely interesting. Across the room, a female worm leaned up on the wall, pressing her jaws against it as though she were trying to gnaw a hole in it. In the middle of the room, three of the hairier types sat together and periodically banged their heads on a table—probably to see if they could still feel pain. One of them wore a fluffy white jacket and the others wore leather cords around their puffy green heads.

Gorman Rimly's grin spread from ear to ear. He stuck his nose deep into his glass of Vibraskeel and breathed deeply. The top of his head popped off like a defective pressure cap and caromed around the walls several times before it splatted sickly back on his head. He let his head rest on the top of the glass. And he'd only drunk half of it.

Gorman Rimly had decided to celebrate. There was nothing to celebrate so he decided the time was exactly right. He only allowed himself one glass of Vibraskeel at times like this. If he had two glasses, the hair might get too thick and he was afraid he'd never find his way out of this place, the Elvis Presley Memorial Intoxication Center. Most people got the hot vibes when they drank it and would commit sexual offenses on the first Inanimate they came to; a few got the buzzes and would just sit wherever they happened to land, humming, with most of their cognitive circuits re-routed; some, like Gorman, had unpredictable reactions. With Gorman it was usually the hair-worms. Sometimes he got Words. He wouldn't see people, he'd see the letters FATMAN squeezed and stretched into the shape of a fat man. Typically he would observe the BARMAN swooping around behind the COUNTER with NEEDMORESKEEL? shooting out of his MOUTH. It eventually gave him a headache when everything turned to subtitles, but it was fun while it lasted.

Near the door, a very pale caterpillar, one in worker's clothing, wiggled through the hair and crawled up on a table. Very slowly he drew himself erect. Over the rustling hair and clicking mandibles, Gorman could hear him make a twittering buzz—he seemed to be trying to make an announcement. Gradually the noise

Evening Promenade

by Wayne Wightman

Real or otherwise, the world was usually pretty interesting to Gorman Rimly . . .

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Illustrated by Gary Freeman

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quietened, except for the three in the middle of the bar who kept knocking their heads against the table. Apparently they couldn't tell that they weren't feeling it anymore.

The worm on the table waved its little arms. "Today," he said, his voice lacking all qualities but treble, I am a happy man! Last week my wife was declared an Inanimate and this afternoon —" (he shook a cloth sack at everyone) "— this afternoon she won the Inanimate Silvya Romilar Look-a-Like Contest!"

Every mandible in the place clicked and jittered in appreciation. The female on the wall hung there with all her legs and arms, but she scraped her jaws rhythmically against the plaster, and the three at the center table banged their heads wildly.

"And!" he said when he'd got their attention again. "To commemorate this, from my winnings of 625 work credits, I'll buy drinks for the house!"

Chaos again—wilder and louder. The female fell off the wall and one of the bangers went momentarily rubbery, as though he may have damaged himself.

Gorman passed up the offer of a free Vibraskeel. The hair was getting incredibly thick. He could hardly see his glass, it was so bad, let alone the mysteriously glowing portrait of Presley himself, somewhere over the bar, whose sleepy eyes saw all, knew all.

Someone rustled beside him. Through the black wiry haze he saw a faintly familiar red-and-green-eyed face. "Howdy!" it said.

"Evening," Gorman replied, reaching out to shake one of the many little hands.

"I'm the lucky fella," the worm said. "My name's Anchek."

"Ah!" Gorman now knew him for the lucky fellow whose wife looked like Silvya Romilar. "Your wife would be proud of winning. It makes a nice day even better, doesn't it?"

"Oh, it does, it does! They gave me three grams of Ecstatiline with the prize money and the bartender gave me a shot of Vibraskeel, so I feel kinda. . . kinda. . . heh-heh. . . !" He cocked his head at Gorman and tried to focus on him that way.

"Do I look funny or something?" Gorman asked. He could imagine what kind of wormface the man might project on him.

"Well. . . ."

"Worms?" Gorman asked.

"Heh-heh!" He plopped the bag of work credits on the counter. "Whiteflies. Lots of whiteflies. Are they always in here? They buzz terribly." Anchek leaned closer to Gorman. "When's it get dark?"

"About an hour. Why?"

"I need to get home before dark. I don't have any night vision. Too much Orgastronium when I was a kid. It was worth it though. Thirteen thousand emissions before I was seventeen and I can usually still think straight."

"That's very impressive for a hairy worm," Gorman said.

When they finished laughing they couldn't remember why they'd started.

"Say, Gorm," Anchek said, his mandibles now drooling slightly. "Do you think those three in the middle are watching me? That one in the fluffy white thing keeps on looking over here. But it's kinda hard to tell where a fly's looking."

Gorman glanced over. The hair obscured nearly everything, which he explained to Anchek.

"Well," Anchek said, "I gotta celebrate anyway." He ordered a drink that came in a half-an-earth globe and had a flaming volcano floating around in it. "This is my special treat," he said.

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He had only begun sucking it through a straw—drinking it very rapidly, Gorman thought—when one of the caterpillars with a leather string around his head then crawled over and stared curiously at the floating volcano.

Anchek's eyes became very small and darted from one person to another. The stranger dipped his finger into his twittering mouth. He hummed loudly as his mandibles drooled and then began to froth and chitter wildly. He twitched as though he were going into a seizure and cavorted grotesquely back to the table where his friends sat. He threw himself into his chair and the three of them banged their heads with renewed frenzy, making the shrieking of insect laughter.

Anchek clutched Gorman's arm. "You saw that. They want my credits—my 625 work credits. Gorman —" His eyes, however emotionless the red and green-flecked eyes of a worm should be, filled with dreadful pleading. "Gorman, I need some help. A little favor. Some of your time."

"Sure." Gorman had nothing to rush home to—only a cot-room with an adjoining screamcloset, which he never used, that his three other neighbors often climbed into.

"My problem is my mouth. I should never a walked in here and said my wife is a ringer for Silvya Romilar and that I got all these work credits. You saw me — an idiot. Those three big whiteflies at that table—they've been sizing me up. They could be planning to take it all away from me, and this bag is my one chance to change my life, to get out of my rut. I need somebody to go home with me. It's only a little ways."

Gorman looked over toward the three. He could barely see them, but Anchek was right. They hadn't seemed especially friendly.

"Why not?" Gorman said. "Why don't we go now?"

They ordered a nerve-cleaner each and choked it down. By the time they got to the street, it seemed to Gorman that the hair in the world had for the most part pulled back into its follicles, and most of the worms had developed legs and arms of the general humanoid fashion. Before long, his friend soon stopped mentioning the annoying buzz of the whiteflies.

"It's nice to be back in the real world, don't you think?" Anchek asked as they both climbed into a publicar.

"Doesn't make any difference to me," Gorman said. "Real or not, it's usually pretty interesting." He sat back, a smile on his face, and watched the passers-by.

The publicar's engine ground at first and gradually picked up some speed.

Now that Gorman could see Anchek without the Vibraskeel distortion, he saw that they were much the same kind of person: both approaching middle age — twenty-five or twenty-six in other words, on the short side, and noticeably convex on the front side. Gorman had lost most of his hair from handling the chemicals at the Halcyon Drug factory, and that made him look a little older.

Anchek punched up the code for his house on the car's panel. He held the bag of credits on his lap and stiffly leaned back.

"Where is it you live?" Gorman asked.

"It's out in the country. On the far edge of the brushband."

"I've never known anyone who lived out there. I've only been able to drive through it once."

"We had to move out there. Two years ago my wife was fined for slipping a city politician a nerve-cleaner. He sobered up and had to be hospitalized for two months. We were sued and had to leave the city. Now I work on the number thirty-seven sewer canal."

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The car moved along through the city, through alternate zones of slums, industrial areas, residential complexes, and ash dumps. Gorman enjoyed watching the gradation of one area into the next.

The weakening glare of evening was about to give way to night when they passed through the last band of slums and entered the country. A panel light flickered, warning them that the city and all its services lay behind them. For half an hour they rolled through the ashband, where incinerated wastes and industrial residues were scattered. Above, the oversmog from the city blocked any star — or moonlight, and it was very dark.

"Can you see anything?" Anchek asked with an edge in his voice.

"Just a kind of level nothing. We're still in the ashband."

Anchek touched a few buttons on the panel and then said, "There's a car a kilometer behind us."

"Just another car," Gorman said. He very much enjoyed a ride in the country, even if it was dark.

A few limp and leafless bushes that hugged the ground near the track signalled their entry into the brushband.

"I shouldn't have done it," Anchek muttered. "Buying drinks for all those. . . people was a big mistake. I should've kept my mouth shut. If I'm robbed, what will my wife say?"

"I thought you said she was an Inanimate."

"Well, it's the way she just lies there. If she were Silvya Romilar, she'd leave me because of this and make her fortune as a dream-object." He muttered on.

Gorman loved the countryside, even if there was only the vaguest hint of the dense brush—but Anchek was beginning to make him nervous. Every several minutes he would ask the panel computer for the number of minutes till they arrived at his house and for the distance of the car behind them.

Just when Gorman thought he was about to see the moon break through the oversmog, Anchek threw both his arms around Gorman's neck in a rough embrace.

"They're right behind us! They're going to stop us, I know it!"

Gorman checked the panel readout. Indeed, it said the car behind them was only six meters back. Behind them, Gorman could see the headlights of the other car and the motionless shapes sitting hunched inside it. Gorman pressed the high-speed button and they lurched forward. But in only a matter of several minutes, the car behind them was again at six meters and closing.

"Gorman! They'll take all my work credits!"

"Let them have them."

"They'll kill us anyway!"

"Then we'll have to run away from them."

"They'll run us down and murder us!"

"Not if they're busy picking up the credit papers."

"You don't understand! I can't let them have them!"

It was a pretty night, but all the shouting was starting to ruin the atmosphere for Gorman.

The panel indicated their pursuers were four meters behind them. They heard a clank on the roof.

"That's it!" Anchek shouted. He went rigid, his hands like pinchers on Gorman's shoulder. "They hooked us with grapplers! Listen—Gorman: if they get me, you take the credits. I live at —" Another clank on the roof. The panel readout said the

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car was 0.01 meters behind—and now their car was slowing. Whoever was behind them was braking and holding them back with the grapplers.

"You shouldn't be so tense, Mr. Anchek. If they want the credits, let them have them. In fact, when we get out, throw it around, up in the air, scatter it, and run. Then we can go to your house. I can have a warm drink and pay my respects to your wife. Then catch a car home."

"Are you crazy?!" Anchek began scrabbling at the controls, finally banging the panel with his fist. "How do we get out of this thing! I can't let them have the money. It's my way out. I can buy my way across the line to Nevanostra. I can live a new life! Be a new person! I can get out of this god damned brush and working on that god damned sewer canal!"

A panel light flashed yellow, indicating some kind of malfunction. Another blinked the white word

stopping

Gorman could make out the surrounding brush more clearly now. By day, he thought, it would probably be rather attractive.

"Listen," Anchek babbled. "We run when we get out. To the right is the number thirty-seven sewer canal. If we're separated we'll meet there." Through his constricted throat, his voice was thin and hard.

A panel light flickered and burned steadily:

car stopped

"Quick! Out!" Anchek pushed Gorman toward the door and stuffed the bag of credits inside his own shirt, leaving his hands free. He leaped out on his own side of the publicar, shouting, "Run! Hide!"

Gorman took a deep breath of the country air. It tasted odd after the endlessly recycled air inside the car. From the car behind them the three men hastily emerged. One of them wore the fluffy white jacket and the other two undoubtedly had leather cords tied around their heads, although Gorman did not wait till they were close enough to find out.

Anchek ran around the car and slugged Gorman on the back as he ran past him. "Hurry! Run!" he shrieked.

Since Anchek was running and the three men were also starting to run, Gorman decided he would do the same, though he was not clear exactly why he should be doing so. Nonetheless, he ran into the dry brush, protecting his face with his hands. It made for awkward running. But not a moment later, he ran headlong into Anchek, whose face glowed with terror in the vague light that filled the brushband.

"Gorman," he rasped, "I broke something. I can't go on!" He pulled the bag from his shirt. "Take this and go to the —"

The fast clumping of three running men and the steady swishing hiss of brush on their clothes suddenly seemed on top of them.

"Run!" Anchek said, pushing the bag at him. "Go! Run!"

Gorman took it and ran. He ran to the right a while and then to the left. Sticks nicked his ankles and shins and brittle twigs scraped his hands and face and stuck to his clothes. He ran one way and then doubled back. For a while, he loped along,

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bending one knee a little more than the other, figuring he'd go in a wide circle. Since he was without any sense of direction it seemed that any way was as good as any other. Besides, when morning came, he probably wouldn't be far from where he started and that would make it more convenient to catch a publicar ride back into the city. And if he were being followed, certainly no one would believe he could be doing what he was doing. Doubt demoralizes.

He ran and loped and sauntered several hours before deciding to settle down for the night in one place.

But as he looked for a clear patch of ground, he saw a small rectangle of yellow light—a candle or perhaps a lantern in a window—not far off.

Sleeping on the cold ground with his back against a sappy tree did not appeal to Gorman because poisonous fumes often rose out of the earth in the cool of the night and asphyxiated the unwary. He blotted the sweat from his face with the cloth bag and made his way toward the light.

The cottage sat nestled inside the vague shapes of stooped and leafless brushtrees. Beyond the house, the even line of the high horizon suggested to Gorman that the number thirty-seven sewer canal lay perhaps only a kilometer away.

Through the window he saw a woman sitting in front of a small brazier, a large black manx sleeping on her lap. Such a tableau entranced Gorman. Rarely had he seen such calm peacefulness.

Very softly, he tapped on the door.

The woman answered immediately, as though she had been expecting him at that very moment. She wore full soft clothes of yellow and green and kept her hair tied back inside a blue scarf. On the scarf were drawings of pins.

"Good evening, ma'am," Gorman said. "My name's Gorman Rimly, and I'm somewhat lost out here, and I wondered if I might wait here till daylight."

She smiled pleasantly. She was middle-aged, very near Gorman's age, and still had all her teeth—very pretty teeth too. Her clean, colorful clothes suggested a much higher class of person than Gorman expected. From behind her, the large manx looked at him with only mild interest.

"Certainly, sir. You seem to have some difficulty." She stepped aside and ushered him in. Her blue eyes shone in the dim light like the shiny blue cloth she tied her hair back with.

"I did have some difficulty, yes," Gorman admitted with a chuckle. "I was invited by a new friend to go for a quiet ride in the country. It wasn't very quiet, as it turned out, and it was pretty dark too, so I didn't get to see much, but it was very interesting. I've seen a lot more of the brushband that I ever thought I would."

She showed him a chair and as he rested he told her about everything from meeting Anchek in the bar to the moment he saw the light in her window. Her blue eyes fixed on him and twinkled more and more as he told the story and grew rounder and rounder.

"That caused all the trouble," he said, pointing to the grimy bag. "People get silly so often about credit papers of one sort and another that I think they must do it out of habit."

"You mean you don't like money?" she said wonderingly.

"Oh yes. I like it. But my mother told me I would always be simple, so I never think that spending it will make me any different from what I am."

She never took her eyes off him, he noticed, but now two vertical lines marked her forehead. The way she watched him, Gorman wondered if she often saw

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people.

"I don't really understand what you mean."

"Mr. Anchek thought if he could spend these work credits he'd be so happy he'd be a new person. Actually, he'd just be Mr. Anchek somewhere else."

"That's a very high-minded point of view," she said, delicately pronouncing each word. The manx momentarily ceased cleaning his paws and looked curiously up at her.

"Thank you, ma'am. But I just say what I see."

"Mr. Rimly, if you're as tired as you appear, I'm sure you would appreciate a few hours of sleep before you return to the city."

"Yes, ma'am. I could rest right here in this chair."

"I couldn't allow you, Mr. Rimly." She stood up, adjusting the blue wrap around her hair, and walked over to the door of the adjoining room. "Guests sleep in here. The bed is soft. A quilt is folded at the foot."

"You're very kind."

She smiled.

By the brazier, the manx stretched his heavy body, his rump high in the air. He watched Gorman enter the bedroom.

The bed was soft and the quilt deliciously warm. One by one Gorman felt his drained muscles slacken, and like an exhalation of warm air, sleep wafted over him, carrying his consciousness away like a fading dream.

Gorman opened his eyes very slowly. Not an inch from his face, the eyes of the cat stared into his. Then, unconcerned, the cat turned its head to the lighted doorway.

Gorman heard the front door close and then the sound of heavy feet.

"Do you know what happened?" whined a male voice. "After all the trouble we went to following those dreks, and them with all those work credits, we got nothing but hard work and trouble."

"We had to grapple their car," said another man, "and I sprung my arm, Lookit these bruises. And some damn brush stuck me in the eye."

"I caught the one who was supposed to have the credits," said the first voice.

"But he didn't?" said the woman with blue eyes.

"We thumped him for a while but all he'd talk about was going to Nevanostra with Silvya Romilar. He got hysterical too."

"She's been in a coma for twelve years, hasn't she?" asked the woman.

"So I heard," said a third man's voice.

The manx jumped off Gorman's bed and strolled into the lighted room. Gorman lay very still and listened.

"We seen this guy in the city at the Presley Center with a bag this big of work credits. Gad damn. All night out running around and thumpin' that guy and all we got was nothin' but wore out. And I got a stick in my eye."

"I stayed home all night," the woman said. "And look what I have."

Gorman heard a soft fluttering sound, like loose papers hitting the floor.

"Gad!"

"That's —"

"Those're what we been chasing!"

"Sssh. The one you let get away is in there sleeping like a dead man. I dropped the cat on him to see if he'd wake up but he didn't even twitch."

"Lookit all 'at money . . ."

"This calls for a nice hot bottle of Vibraskeel for three."

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"Yeah!"

Gorman heard the hard sounds of bottles opening and the softer whispers of the credit papers being gathered up. Bottles gurgled.

"Let me do it to him," the whining voice said.

"I caught him," the whining voice said.

"I caught him," the woman said. "He's mine."

More gurgling liquid going down throats.

"How you wanta do it?"

Her voice dropped lower. "I thought I'd spray him with some Felilure and then give kitty some Amphidrine and let kitty play games."

"My god. I don't want a blood bath in our only bed. Give me another bottle."

Gorman moved only his eyes to see if there was a window in the room. There wasn't. It began to get very warm under the quilt.

"Let me axe him," said the whiner. "So nothing goes wrong. Give 'im a split personality."

"More Vib'skeel?"

"Lookit all 'at money! We could get a house in the city. We could be somebodies."

For an hour they drank and Gorman heard six different schemes presented for killing him—everything from tearing his face off to braining him behind the Nixon Organ Bank and then selling him at the side door for parts. The whiner kept insisting on the axe.

Their speech became more and more distorted until they only grunted and moaned at each other. Through a slitted eye, Gorman could see an occasional head look around the doorsill at him, measuring him, making sure he was still there, apparently deep in sleep.

Finally, when their words had only the slightest resemblance to the noises of communication, the one with the fluffy white jacket careened through the doorway with his axe, his knees rubbery, and before Gorman could even be terrified, the axeman dropped to the floor and quietly went to sleep.

A head peeked once around the corner and disappeared.

"Paszed out," the woman said heavily. "You zhud go agzum ri' now."

Gorman decided he should not stay in the bed any longer. He moved very quietly, pulling the fluffy white jacket off the sleeping man and putting it on himself. The man was lighter than he looked, so Gorman had little difficulty getting him up on the bed and covering him up.

There was movement in the doorway. The manx stood there eyeing him curiously.

Gorman shook his body once to get it loose and then began a low howling moan. The cat cocked his head. Gorman threw his arms over his head as though he had a blinding skeel braindrain, and wobbled and staggered through the front room, bouncing off several chairs for effect, and banged out the door.

The woman lay on the floor like an Inanimate, her eyes still open and pretty as tinted glass. The two men gurgled helplessly in the corner, slurring laughter at their blind-walking friend, and seeing (probably) some shrieking white-jacketed insect skittering across the floor.

Outside, the night air was cool and fresh with the smell of clean straw.

Gorman strolled away from the house a few hundred meters and something odd struck him: he looked down. At his feet stood the black hulk of the manx, who sat down and began studying the undergrowth when Gorman stopped. And

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something else odd. Gorman looked up: for some reason, the oversmog had broken and he could see several stars. A white one and a yellow one. It had been a long time since he'd seen stars.

Far away behind him, the sounds muffled by the thatch of brush, Gorman heard shouting, a shriek laid over the top of it like dressing, and then more barking shouts. Probably someone had finally used the axe.

He walked on, the cat delicately picking his way behind him, coming eventually to the number thirty-seven sewer canal which was levied up on both sides, actually flowing above ground level. He and the cat scaled the embankment together. On each side he could see the pale brushband stretch evenly far and away. Before him, diminishing to a point at the horizon, the dark clotted waters flowed without a whisper.

The manx loped along with him, making not a sound.

It was a long walk, and his feet ached, but it was a beautiful night that Gorman Rimly walked through on his way home, and neither he nor the manx thought of anything else. ●

WHY WE CHOSE THIS STORY

The character Gorman Rimly appears in several Wightman stories, sometimes just in cameo bits. We find him a fascinating personality — one who has apparently adapted to a ghastly extrapolation of our current follies with regard to quality of life on this planet. His unflappable good humor and benign "interest" in the upheaval and mayhem going on around him may be genius or dementia — but, for him, it works. (A psychologist once suggested that insane people are those who fall apart over what is really happening in the world. The rest of us adjust.) Rimly also reminds us of "Chance", the idiot-savant in the film "Being There". There is black humor of a delectable kind in the bar episode and even in the murderous antics of the thieves. And there is something immensely touching about the way the polluted sky opens up to reveal those stars at the end of Rimly's promenade.

"Wayne Wightman" by Mitchell S. White

I met Wayne Wightman in a bookstore in San Francisco. He was holding two books—*The Structure of the Universe* by some German and *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* by Hunter Thompson. I had in my hands three or four smutty books which I occasionally write as well as read. But at that meeting, neither one of us was thinking very much about books. In line just in front of us was an attractive young woman with short dark hair and eyes so dark they looked like they were all pupil. She was utterly mad.

In a kind of rapidfire monotone at which the insane are so proficient, she was telling WW all about what she had just done for $5.00 back around the corner and what she had done the day before in a hot tub and what she had and what she wanted to get rid of and what she planned on getting. It was all extremely vile. Even for my tastes, it was vile. It was curdling. But WW stood there, listening attentively, nodding once in a while.

Finally, when she paused long enough to breathe, he asked her, "Why are you telling me this?"

"Because I thought you wanted to know," she said.

He nodded and she went on, detailing assorted degradations like they were so many tomatoes or cabbages or leeks.

The clerk up ahead of us was sweating profusely. Finally, we all paid for what we got (as we always do) and got out. I talked to WW out on the sidewalk. I told him I was a writer.

"I thought things like that could only be made up," I said. "No one would believe

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any of it if we told it."

He nodded and said, "I write science fiction because it's more comfortable to pretend to ignore the present and to warn of the future. When a person reads sf, he can always lay aside a story he's finished and have that feeling you get when you come out of a nightmare and say, 'Am I glad I'm here and not there!' No one has to believe that sf has any relevance to himself—the label itself assures that. I write only about the present." He nodded back at the bookstore. "I'll write about her sometime and no one will believe it. But it will be all right. You have to be a person on whom nothing is wasted."

I'll end the story there. It goes on, but I'll end it there. He was right. Whether you want to be a writer or just a person who keeps on keeping on, you can't afford to let anything go to waste.

As for the dark-haired woman—he has written about her, but no one will believe it. It's only science fiction.

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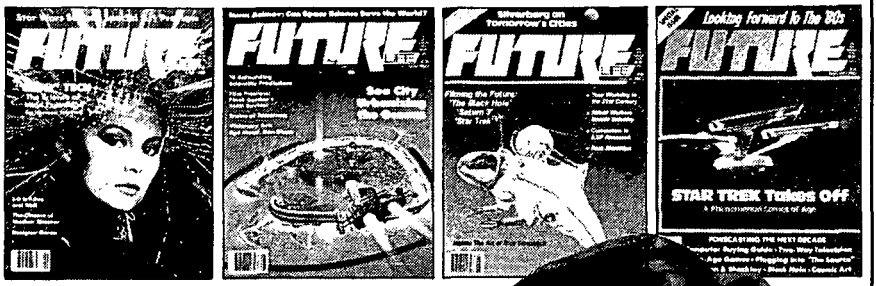

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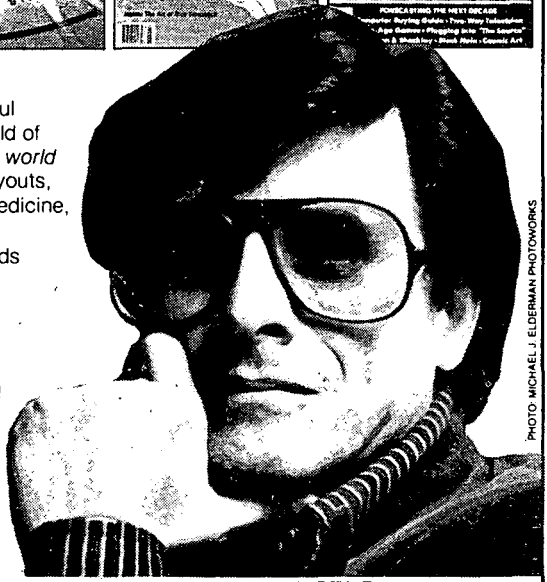

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by M. Lindholm

the small One

"HI, YOU carry honesty to the point of idiocy." Vandien was sitting on the plank seat of the wagon, a fold of his cloak held fastidiously over his nose. "And you, Vandien, you carry your idiocy with honesty. Do you truly believe that muffling your nose will keep the plague off you?"

"If it but keeps the smell away, I shall be grateful. The very air is painted with death. Come, hurry up with that, and let's be away from this place."

Ki looked up and grinned at him with her teeth, her nostrils pinched tight with the effort of not smelling. Three bales of red silk were already resting on the white stone steps. Ki grunted with effort as she swung a bundle of furs down from her shoulder.

"Done!" she breathed. Her brown hair was plastered to her neck and forehead with sweat. "And if you were in such a hurry, you might have speeded things up by helping."

Ki snatched up a fold of her cloak and pressed it against her nose. She hastened down the steps, skipping gingerly over a putrefying arm that one corpse had beseechingly reached in its last moments. She tried not to look at the body, for even the flies could not obscure the gaping sores of blotchfever. She clambered up the tall wheel and onto the seat. Vandien made a great show of recoiling from her.

"My hurry is to be gone, not to get the fever sooner. You'll not get me off this wagon until we've left this death hole far behind. Look you how they lie, unburied and unburned. If any folk here survived, would they leave the bodies thus? You must know that Merchant Kervay lies dead within that mansion. Why leave the silks and hides here to fade and rot? Why not keep them and sell them in Kaviani?"

They had been all through this before. Vandien was but making talk to dispel the unearthly silence of the ravaged town and the buzzing of countless flies.

"It is a pride with me to do as I say I will." Ki smacked at a bloated fly on her arm. It died in a small splat of red. "I was paid in advance to deliver these goods to his doorstep. There they be!" She pointed at them self-righteously.

"And it would have nothing to do with certain Romni taboos about selling the property of the dead, would it?" Vandien asked snidely. "Ki, let us be on our way out of this miserable place. Never have I seen a town so full of death."

Ki shook the reins and the immense grey horses leaned down into their harness. The wagon creaked off. The rear half of the freight wagon still held bags of salt to be delivered to Kaviani, where Ki hoped to take on another load. A gaily painted cuddy comprised the front half of the wagon. The cheeriness of the small living quarters was a jarring counterpoint to the stillness and carnage of the dead city. Ki guided the wagon with a light and sure hand, veering her team around the occasional body that had fallen in the street. She looked about with a reluctant curiosity, but Vandien, cloak still over his nose, merely fastened his dark eyes on the horizon, as if his wishes could hasten them out of the death place.

The number of bodies on the street increased near the city well. Vandien stared over them and away; perhaps the welted scar that ran over his left cheek stood out a little more plainly on a dark face gone paler. But Ki's eyes danced over the pathetic corpses and tangled clumps of bodies in a detached horror. She was filled

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with a helpless foreboding. This was the end result of it all: of childhood's freer days, of the blooming of maiden and the quickening of young man. For this the young women conceived and bore their babes, for this the farmer planted the field and reaped the harvest, so that, one and all, they might lie down in a dusty street and die, so that the wind might flutter their robes and the flies feast at their open sores. Ki felt a strange cold edging up her body, encasing her spine in ice. She drew her cloak more tightly about her, and shivered with an other-worldly chill.

Vandien brushed the dark curls away from his damp forehead and glanced across at his friend. He could feel the tension strung taut and cutting within her. Too much death. Too much death, and she would never learn to handle it well, for she would never learn to block it out. Every dead child on the street was a personal affront to her, every dead husbandman a reminder of what one could lose. As if by accident, he rattled the whip in its socket and the greys increased their pace.

Ki sniffed and then exhaled a shuddering sigh. Vandien glanced across at her surreptitiously, but she met his dark eyes with her unwavering green ones.

"Road dust," she explained coldly, and casually scratched at her shoulder before she pulled her cloak more closely about her. And Vandien sighed too, for he knew that her nightmares tonight would be vivid and noisy ones.

"Vandien, could you perhaps take the reins for awhile?"

Vandien shifted on the seat to regard Ki closely. "Are you feeling all right? Ki, by the gods, if you've decided to bring that fever with us....."

"No. T'is but that I am a little tired. I had looked forward to the diversion of a day in Lelui, and, cheated of it, I feel dull and stupid. I thought I might go within the wagon and rest for a bit." Ki kept her eyes on the road ahead.

"Whatever," Vandien shrugged in a tone as casual as her own. Ki halted the greys and gave the reins over into Vandien's hands without looking at him. He sat silently as she crawled into the cuddy and shut the door firmly behind her. Sigurd's great head had swiveled about as soon as Vandien had taken the reins. He now regarded Vandien with a gaze of purest dislike.

"Well, get up anyway," Vandien advised him, slapping the reins lightly on the broad grey backs before him. "Neither of us have much choice in this matter."

"Try not to rock over every pothole in the road!" Ki called warningly from within.

"I'm bound to miss a few!" Vandien called back vindictively. Well he knew he was not the driver Ki was, but then he had not been born to it as she had. He rattled the whip to step up the horses. Since they had not stopped in Lelui, they would reach a good resting place long before nightfall. He licked the grey road dust from his dry lips and thought longingly of the river.

Vandien paused only once on his ugly trek out of the stricken city. He halted the wagon to free a mule left tied to a rail. The creature had been bonily grateful and had followed the wagon for some ways before turning aside. As Vandien drove away from the last scattered cottages on the outskirts of Lelui, he thought of cows trapped fodderless in sheds, of watchdogs that must die on their chains, of sheep that would, shepherdless, provide fine sport for wolves. He tried not to think that perhaps there were small children wailing to empty houses. Glancing back to make sure the wagon door was still shut, he privately made the sign that begs Keeva to have mercy on the small ones.

Trees became more common as they passed out of the cultivated lands and approached the river. By late afternoon Vandien's road was a corridor between ranks of upward reaching trees. Their welcome shade dappled across the horses' broad backs. Then the team topped a small rise and Vandien could see the silver

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band that was the river. There was the fording spot, and the place they would stop for the night. It was a welcome sight, but even more so was the prospect of company. For a Romni wagon, team unhitched to graze, was drawn up in the shade of the great trees.

"Ki!" Vandien banged loudly on the small door. "Come out! There's a wagon at the ford, one I think we know. Come read it for me!"

For a long moment there was silence. Vandien banged again on the small door, and it opened with a jerk.

"I was coming!" Ki exclaimed ill-temperedly. "Don't beat the door down." Her long brown hair was disheveled on her shoulders. Her eyes were bright in her face, her cheeks flushed. The traveling cloak was still drawn close about her. Had she been weeping?

Vandien jerked his eyes away from her face. At times like these, Ki was best left to herself. Or distracted with something totally unrelated, such as old friends on the road.

She stood up on the plank seat to peer at the wagon. Then she lost her balance and sat down abruptly beside Vandien.

"That's what I get for sleeping in a moving wagon," she muttered dismally. "Dizzy and queasy. I'll feel better in a moment. The wagon is turned a bit away from us, but I think I read it as Chya the Barren's."

"Chya the Barren?" Vandien almost laughed aloud. "The idea of a barren Romni woman; usually they have as many children clinging to them as a dog has fleas."

"Usually," Ki agreed gravely. "Children are the one wealth of the Romni. And Chya once had three. But then she and her man crossed the Windsingers. They dared to make rain in a town the Windsingers had cursed for non-payment of tribute. The town was dusty as old bones, and the folk were starving. Chya and Trawn made the rain come, as some of the Romni know still how to do. Then were the Windsingers wroth, and they cursed the family. The three children sickened and died like grain without water. Trawn took a fever and became simple. Chya was left to care for him. No children she bore in two years, and then she knew what her share of the curse was. They travel apart from the other Romni now, for the sight of a child brings Chya to tears."

"Jolly companions for an evening," Vandien commented dourly. Death, death, and more death. Vandien found himself longing for the noise and taverns of Kavani.

"It will be well. There are no children with us to upset her. And Chya and I are understanding of one another, for there is much we share."

Vandien glanced across at her again. Ki huddled within her cloak. Crouched that way, she might have been a wayward child. But Ki was no child. She knew what it was to lose a man and two children of her own. Yes, she and Chya would have much in common. And Vandien felt a gloom settling over the wagon such as his quick nature could not bear.

Ki stood up on the seat, balancing with one hand locked in Vandien's dark curls. "Hoy, Chya! Hoy, Tra..." She sat down suddenly.

"Still dizzy," Vandien grinned at her. Ki did not smile back.

"There's no smoke," she said softly.

"Too warm a day for a cook fire yet," Vandien replied, but his heart sank within him with a sure knowledge.

The silence of the wagon as they drew near was ample warning. When Sigurd raised his head and whinnied a greeting, there was no welcoming stir from the

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wagon. Vandien pulled the team up while they were yet a distance away.

"Stay here," he warned Ki. "Let me look first."

"In life they were my friends," Ki replied quietly. "Shall I fear them in death?"

"Blotchfever is not kind to the dying," Vandien reminded her. "Let me go, and you shall keep your memories as they were."

"Blotchfever can hold no new horrors for me. As a child I once saw an entire camp of Romni die around us. My father and I alone survived. To us fell the burning and the freeing. As it once more falls to me. No, Vandien, you may be the one to hold the team and wait."

Ki jumped from the seat, stumbled, but regained herself and walked slowly toward the silent wagon. Vandien knew what she would find within.

He wiped his sweating hands on his tunic front. He grimaced wryly, and decided He set the wheel brake, wrapped the reins about the handle.

"Stand!" He warned the team gruffly. In a few strides he caught up with Ki, and slipped his arm around her. She met his eyes, and then tolerated it. Together they approached the silent wagon.

Ki climbed up on the wagon seat, opend the door and peered within. "Chya," she groaned, and fell silent. It was then that Vandien saw the figure on the riverbank. It stirred.

Trawn's eyes were clear and lucid when Vandien rolled him over, and Vandien knew that he had arrived just in time to see him die. "Friend," murmured Trawn. He took two short breaths then drew in a long one. "It killed Chya and the fever takes me. Friend, not all that is small is young. Know that I speak truly, and do what must be done. Do what I could not do. For a snake is not a stick." For a moment Trawn's eyes met Vandien's. Then they rolled slowly upward in his face. Vandien lay him gently back.

"Vandien! Van!" Ki's voice was a long drawn out cry.

She was hastening from the wagon, a small squirming bundle against her chest. Her green eyes glowed feverishly with a strange triumph.

"He lives, Vandien, he lives," she cried. Within her arms stirred an infant, wraped in a faded length of blue cloth. Ki was using the cleanest corner of the befouled cloth to dab blood and saliva away from the infant's grubby face. A few scraps of dingy blond hair clung to its large skull. Wide dark blue eyes rolled dolorously above its fat cheeks. It was possibly the ugliest child that Vandien had ever seen.

"He's filthy," Vandien said loudly, appalled.

"Poor little creature was huddled into Chya's body. He was just lying there, eyes wide in the darkness, wondering why she no longer held him or rocked him or saw to his needs. The blood is from open sores on her arms. Poor little thing."

Vandien was torn between pity for the waif and a strange disgust at its appearance. He voiced neither. "Then Chya's dead? Trawn made a few words now, just before he went. I thought you said they had no children."

"They didn't," Ki answered softly.

Vandien gazed at the child's blond hair and thought of Trawn's midnight locks and swarthy skin. "I had heard talk of the Romni stealing children, but I..."

"There are plenty of children in the world that no one wants. Stealing would be the last thing Chya would resort to. Besides, he is but a babe, scarcely past three moons, I would guess. Sad must be the circumstances that force a mother to give up one this small." Ki sighed and shook her head. The baby stirred slightly in her arms and she shifted it, to hold it closer against her. It nuzzled its face against her

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shoulder, its mouth opening hungrily to quest for a nipple. "There, child, there. First we will clean you and then we will feed you. Poor little hungry one."

The babe wriggled about in Ki's arms until it could look up into her face and watch her speak. A baby smile dawned on its features. Vandien watched in awe as Ki's grave features seemed to melt away. She answered the baby's smile with a rare and gentle one of her own. She stood quietly gazing down into the little face as if totally unaware of the death wagon but steps away from her.

"Strange, how a child as hungry as he must be does not cry," Vandien muttered uneasily. Aloud, he added, "Ki what say that we move the wagon up the river before we pause for washing and feeding the child? I am not a superstitious man, but it seems unwholesome to camp so close to a death place."

Ki awoke from her trance. She looked at Vandien vaguely for a moment before answering, striving to recall the question. "We cannot leave yet," she said at last, as if stating the obvious to a child. "The bodies of Chya and Trawn must be placed within their wagon, and the wagon set afire. The team must be freed of harness. Then put your right palm upon the forehead of each horse and say to the beast, 'Now go thy way, for thy life is thy own.' Try to do it right, Van." Ki gave him a sidelong glance that seemed an attempt to renew their usual chafing of one another.

"Vandien! My people would shudder to hear you name me so, with only half a name! Would you make me a bastard with my own name? And why does all the heavy work fall to me, while you sit cuddling that baby?"

He waited for what he knew would be a stinging reply. Too well he knew that Ki's tongue was a sharp one. But Ki's eyes had wandered back to the child in her arms and she was once more engrossed in it. The spark of raillery had gone out of her. She snuggled the baby even closer to her and turned toward her wagon.

"Ki?" Vandien called after her in disbelief.

"What?" She half turned and spoke in mild irritation. "Oh. Oh, do it for me this time, Van. Another time I'll do your share of the chores for you. Only can't you see that I'm busy now?" Frowningly she shook her head at him and continued to the wagon.

"Vandien, if you please," he muttered to himself.

Chya and Trawn's team, freed of their hobbles, stood in foolish curiosity watching the wagon burn. Vandien ruefully pulled his tunic from his back and tossed it onto the flames. It was his second to last tunic, but he could not abide the blood and other matter that had rubbed from Trawn's still-warm body onto him. And he would not cherish the memories of Chya's body.

One might have thought her death a peaceful one. Her empty eyes were open in a brown face unlined by care. Even in death her generous mouth seemed to curve in a gentle smile. Only her ravaged arms with their gaping wounds betrayed her. Privately Vandien wondered if there had not been rats at the body. But then the baby would also have been bitten. He shrugged. Blotchfever did strange things to a body.

A slim moon was rocking on the horizon when Vandien pulled the team up at a clean campsite up river. He had not seen Ki since she had taken the baby within the wagon. He had knocked on the door once, only to be shushed and reminded that she was busy. Now he jumped down from the seat to feel solid turf beneath his boot heels. Near at hand great trees with grey trunks and upward reaching branches covered in dense green foliage promised a plentitude of firewood.

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Beyond them was the glint and gurgle of the river.

"Damn fine camp," he congratulated himself. Then, louder, "Ki, I've found a stopping place!" There was no reply. Vandien shook his head. Now that was as unlike Ki as anything could be. Or was it? What did he know of Ki when she was around children? He shrugged and went to chores to occupy himself.

Unharnessing Sigmund was accomplished in short order. Vandien gave him a quick once over rub and turned the great beast loose. Then he stood for a moment, chewing his lower lip and regarding Sigurd narrowly. Sigurd returned the favor, laying his ears back and wrinkling his muzzle at Vandien. There were times when Vandien had unharnessed him and rubbed him down. There were also times when Vandien had been bitten, had his feet stepped on, or had a big head slammed painfully into his chest.

"Ki!" Vandien called invitingly. "How about giving me a hand with camp?" Vandien listened to silence. Damn the woman. He moved up on Sigurd threateningly and began to work on the stiff buckles. Moments later, Sigurd was free of harness, with a sore muzzle, and Vandien was massaging his shoulder, wondering how dull teeth could leave such dents.

He glared at the silent wagon. He would not call Ki again. If she didn't see fit to at least offer to do her share of the chores, then let her sit in a dark wagon. He would not beg for her help and company. He had begun to be a little nettled at Ki's absorption in the child. But by the time he had finished making their camp, he took a calmer view.

Vandien pulled his boots off and stretched his feet luxuriously in the free air of the night. The tea was ready. He poured a mug of it and sipped at the steaming contents gingerly. So quiet tonight! This was how it must have been for Ki after she lost Sven and the children. Traveling alone by day, doing all for herself come night, and then spending a short evening staring into the flames before she took to her bed. What would she see in those flames? Small faces with blue-grey eyes?

She had told him about them once. It was not the way of her folk to speak of their dead; to do so in detail and to outsiders was poor in taste and reverence. But he had heard the skeleton of the story, and had come to know many of the details over his times with Ki. Still there came nights when he would wake to find Ki clutching at him frantically and babbling in her sleep. Then she must be held until the dream subsided, and woe to him who might dare to mention such things in the light of a cool grey morning.

Vandien sighed away the pressure of his irritation and rose to light a dish lamp. He tugged open the small cuddy door behind the wagon seat, for the first time anxious about the silence from within. The light of his small lamp danced hesitantly into the dark.

Ki was curled amidst the hides and blankets on the sleeping platform. Within the warm curl of her body nestled the small bundle, wrapped now in Ki's old red tunic. Ki did not stir as he entered, but the small head in the circle of her arm shifted. Its eyes fixed unwaveringly upon Vandien.

The baby's eyes were dark. The shifting lamp light spilled over its features, giving it for a moment the cast of an old and depraved man. It was offended and angered at Vandien's presence. The infant glared at him in a most unchildlike manner. For a moment Vandien hesitated, feeling as if he had walked in on Ki with a new lover, rather than Ki asleep by a child.

Vandien held the lamp higher as he moved closer. Ki slept as if exhausted, and Vandien wondered at that, for usually she slept like a wary cat. Her long brown hair

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was tossed about her face and shoulders and tendrilled out upon the sleeping skins. Her mouth was slightly parted and she breathed huskily. She had discarded her cloak. Her tanned arms and legs spilled from her simple brown tunic. Her face was unlined by care; her lips moved slightly in a dream song.

The baby burrowed its small face back into the crook of Ki's arm, but it continued to regard Vandien with suspicion. It nuzzled into her making small sucking noises. Not too long away from the breast, Vandien speculated, and wondered if Ki had been able to persuade it to eat.

"Ki?" he called gently. "Ki, camp's all made. How about a cup of tea and a bite to eat?"

She didn't move until he gently smoothed the tangle of hair back from her face; then her eyelids opened slowly and smoothly, as if she had not slept at all. She smiled sleepily up at him and Vandien's heart leapt out to her. He seated himself on the edge of the sleeping platform and touched her shoulder gently.

The baby screamed. In rage it screamed and writhed and waved its tiny fists at Vandien. The dark eyes blazed with hatred and jealousy. Ki sat up abruptly, drawing the child to her and seeking to still its cries.

"What happened?" she asked wildly, checking the boy all over for some sign of hurt. "Did you sit on him?"

"No, I was well clear of him. Gods, Ki, there's blood on his face...." Vandien leaned forward hastily, steadying the child's head gently to peer at him. His stomach went tight at the thought of anything that small being in pain and bleeding. Despite its yells and surprisingly strong efforts to free itself from his grasp, Vandien wiped around the small face with the corner of its makeshift garment. The baby's face came clean, the small firm lips rosy but uncut. Ki pulled the child away from Vandien to stare puzzled into the small face. The baby instantly stopped its wailing and snuggled to her. The dark eyes softened, gazed into Ki's with warmth and gratitude. A merry little smile transformed its homely face. Ki smiled down upon it, and cooed to it softly.

"There. There, now. Did Van startle the little one? Did Van give the small one a scare? Silly baby, to be afraid of Van! Silly boy!"

The infant gurgled in an attempt at laughter.

"Vandien," Vandien said brusquely. Then, catching Ki's arm, he drew it forth into the lamplight, despite her protests as she resteadied the baby in her other arm.

"It bit you! The little devil bit you. That's where the blood came from!"

A circular rosy mark disfigured the soft inside of Ki's arm. Blood still oozed sluggishly from the pores within the circle. Ki looked at it dispassionately.

"I couldn't get him to eat, no matter what I offered. He's too young to have been weaned from the breast. Poor thing, so hungry it tried to suckle at my arm and sucked hard enough to bring blood." Ki shrugged.

"It's a wonder to me it didn't wake you. It must have stung." Vandien frowned.

"A little sting wouldn't wake me from such a sleep as I was in," Ki replied, yawning. "Or such a dream of peace and plenty. Are we stopped for the night? Do you want help setting up the camp?"

"Yes. No." Vandien replied abruptly. He was suddenly irritated with her and the child, and irritated with himself, for he could put no reason to his anger. Her sleepy complacency nettled him. "Though, as always, I doubt that my work will please you."

Vandien backed out of the wagon. Ki looked after him puzzledly. Then she gazed down at the baby in her arms and found its bright little eyes already seeking

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hers. How sweet it would be just to nestle back down with this wonder of a child and resume her warm sleep. But, no, the baby still had not eaten. He still seemed lively and strong enough, but Ki was sure she should offer him some broth. He must eat something. She swung her feet to the floor of the wagon and stood up. A wave of dizziness swept over her, and she hastily sat down again. "That's what I get for sleeping in a moving wagon," she told the child cheerily. She waited a moment for the world to stop whirling, and then made her way out of the wagon to the campfire.

She could glimpse Vandien through the trees, filling the water skins from the river. She picked up his cooling mug of tea and drained it, amazed at how wonderful the liquid heat of it felt sliding down her throat. She sniffed at the pot bubbling over the fire. It was their usual traveling fare of dried meat and roots boiled into a sort of stew, with hard crusted bread to sop in it. She attempted to lay the baby down to dish out her share, but his loud wails put him immediately back in her arms. Vandien came upon them, his scowl only slightly obscured by the night shadows.

Without a word he slopped food into a pottery bowl for her. Glancing at his own empty mug, he refilled it and brought forth a mug for Ki. They ate sitting across from each other as the flames of the fire danced between them. Vandien snapped his food down in a total denial of his usual well-bred manner, eyeing the baby all the while. Ki was the first to speak.

"Jealousy ill becomes you, my friend. Vandien, never have I seen you like this, even over another man. Why hiss and spit at me over a child?"

"Jealous?" Vandien was incredulous. "I, jealous–and over a child? Ki, you know that to be rankest nonsense." He narrowed his eyes at her over the flames, waiting for her to take up the gauntlet. A half-smile played about the corners of her mouth.

"When you speak of nonsense and rankness, Van...." she began playfully. But at that moment the baby went off in a series of wails. Instantly Ki's attention was caught. Her mind had room for only one thought: This child must be fed. She nestled the child to her and rocked it, spooning up a dab of broth. Vandien was cancelled out of her attention as completely as if he were but a tree.

When next Ki looked up, her mouth was drawn and her eyes worried. Thin lines of weariness that Vandien had never noticed before were etched onto her face. That spark had gone out of her green eyes. In the firelight, her skin was paler than even the dust of the road could make it.

"The child won't eat," Ki spoke softly, in despair. "I've tried everything, Vandien, and I can't get him to eat. It worries me so."

Vandien felt a strange pity well up in him, not for the child, but for Ki. Her helplessness was complete.

"The boy seems strong enough," Vandien said at last. Awkwardly he searched for comforting words. "His voice is strong, at least. In two more days we should reach Kaviani. Sooner, if we push the team from dawn until dusk. There perhaps we can find a woman in milk, willing to take on an extra child. What think you?"

Ki looked up from wiping refused food from the baby's chin. "A woman? A goat would be better, I think. I have heard of goats taught to let a baby nurse from them. And a goat would travel better, with fewer complications."

"Travel? Ki, what have you got in your head? You can't raise a baby in the front of a freight wagon! A child needs a home, stability, parents, friends. Anyone who would raise a child in a wagon...."

"I was raised in a wagon," Ki cut in mildly. "As are all the children of the Romni. It

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does them no harm, but prepares them for a wagon of their own."

"But Ki, have you considered the burdens of a child? Gone would be the joys of the taproom, the peace of long quiet days traveling in the wagon, the spontaneity of a noon pause by a river to bathe in cool waters and rest on the sand together..."

"There are sacrifices, but the rewards of a child have their own sweetnesses. Look on his little face, Van. The fates have sent him to me. A child, the rarity of a perfect, healthy child. A child for the raising. Van, he is a gift from the fates to me....to us?"

The last she uttered more questioningly, as if she feared she were cheating Vandien of his fair share. But Vandien rose with a muttered, "Vandien, if you please," and walked a few steps away from her. He stood silently, gazing out through the trees, his back to the fire. He did not turn around when he spoke.

"Ki, you must believe me when I say the fates never intended me to be a father, or even the guardian of a child. I have no patience with them when they are young. They are small, dirty, noisy and they cry at unfortunate times. And it is not jealousy but factuality that makes me say that keeping the child will be losing me." Vandien fell silent, combating an unusual huskiness in his voice. He hunched his shoulders as if beset by a sudden chill. He was shamed by his words, true though he knew them to be, and humiliated that he must speak such things aloud.

"So be it," Ki replied, preoccupied. "Vandien, come see. I think he is beginning to feed."

Vandien whirled, sparks in his eyes, but Ki's gaze was fixed only on the child, who even then drooled the rejected food out of his mouth. Unbelieving Vandien watched as Ki tenderly wiped the small chin and urged more food into the pouting mouth.

"So be what? Ki, have you listened to me?"

"So be that I must keep this child, and therefore must lose you. It is unfortunate, but I have no choice. I assume you will still go with us as far as Kaviani. Vandien, do you think he might eat grain boiled to a mush?" The child must be fed. She must feed the child.

Vandien could find no anger in himself, only disbelief. This was no mockery, no raillery of Ki's. He stood for a moment, making no answer, feeling only his separation from the familiar. Disjointed, disconnected, he poured his tea out on the ground, wiped and stowed the mug. As he moved toward the wagon, Ki spoke.

"Would you be comfortable sleeping under the wagon?" Her voice held no trace of apology.

"No," Vandien replied tightly. "I damn well wouldn't."

"Well, if you would...." Ki paused. "I only fear that you might disturb the baby. A child's rest is very important. If only I could get him to eat, then I....."

"I'll sleep under the wagon, Ki." Vandien's tone put an end to the conversation. He gathered his gear from the cuddy and heaved it carelessly under the wagon. Then he stalked off into the night, to check the horses, he told himself, seeing as how Ki seemed to give no thought to them. When he returned from his walk, Ki was within the wagon.

Vandien settled himself beneath it and stared up at the huge axle. He studied the floorboards and wondered what in the name of the gods that might be had gotten into Ki. Gone was her mockery and slashing tongue. Yes, and gone were her swift moments of fleeting affection, her touch on his shoulder as light as the glancing breeze, that slow smile over the flames of the fire that could stir his blood and make everything right between them. Where was Ki in all this?

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Yes, and where was Vandien? Why had he thrown that hasty ultimatum at her? Pride, if nothing else, would make her answer as she did. What had he expected her to do? Abandon the adopted child of her friends to a slow death? If he, Vandien, came across the orphaned child of his old friend Dworkin, would not he feel an obligation to it? No, he had been totally unreasonable with Ki. And tomorrow he must pay for it. Few were the times when he had ever admitted to Ki a desire to unsay his words. But tomorrow he would do so, and endure her making merry over it as best he might.

He listened to the creak and rustling of Ki's familiar settling. She would be curled in the bed skins now, her souvenir nestled against her. The movement in the wagon ceased. Vandien heard the crackling of the fire, and the rip and munch of the horses grazing. Then there came to his ears a muted singing, a shrill whining song in a voice only vaguely akin to Ki's. A lullabye, he wondered, and against his will his ears tuned themselves to the words.

"I am the Oak
And you the Mistletoe.
Twine about me, darling.
Feed on me.
I am the strong
And you appear the weak
But in your life can I
Eternal be.
Feed on me, darling,
Feed on me.
Take your life from me,
Darling, feed on me."

Vandien's hackles rose at the song and the unearthly tones of it. The words made small sense to him. Oak? Mistletoe? What matter of creatures might they be? He continued to listen, but the song only repeated itself endlessly. A shiver not of cold ran up his spine, and he rolled soundlessly from under the wagon. Better to sleep by the fire than to hear such song at night.

Ki was swimming through deep waters, waters deep and warm and thick as a warm evening. The warmth caressed her and flowed with her blood. She swam through heavy skies until she looked down upon a clearing in the midst of a tangled woods. Someone was singing a tune like rainfall on parched leaves. Ki floated closer to listen. She settled upon the deep grass and the song surrounded her. The song was of small things being nurtured by the strong, of life flowing from the large to the small.

Then the song changed. It spoke of lives touching, of how no living thing might exist alone. Then within the circle of Ki's arms came a warmth and a weight. And a babe was nestled against her. Within her breasts flowed and swelled the milk for its needs. She suckled the child, and its eyes were warm upon her. And once more Ki was part of the chain, a living link in the circle of life. She was the child and the child was she and the milk that flowed between them was the life they shared. She passed on life to the child; in the child she lived. She flowed forth into his being ...

"Ki? Are you awake yet? Ki?"

Vandien felt stiff, rumpled, and abashed. Hard enough to speak his words without having to wake Ki to do it. But Ki slept on. The baby was motionless in the crook of her body. I's small face was nuzzled into her shoulder. So still it was, Vandien wondered if it still lived. The babe had been through much. Guiltily, Vandien felt that he should pity it. But he could not. Any other child, he told himself, any other child but not this one. And then he wondered at the thought.

Gingerly he seated himself. Neither stirred. He reached to gently shake Ki. Then his hand froze and he felt the breath sucked out of his body by a cold horror.

Revealed on Ki's face was the pale outline of a fever blotch. The fever that was

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the first symptom burned within her with a heat that rose to Vandien's outstretched hand. "Keeva have mercy," he breathed in agony. "Death rides with us." Ki did not stir. Her breathing was slow and noisy.

What to do, what to do? Vandien tried to still his whirling thoughts, to sort out his wild impulses from his useful ones. There was no sense now in pushing on to Kaviani. If the fever did not kill them both before they got there, the townspeople would stone them for bringing the pestilence among them. No, they must remain here. He would make Ki as comfortable as he could.

But the moment Vandien touched the blankets to arrange them the closer about her, the baby began a squalling. At its first cry, Ki's eyes flew open. She sat up abruptly to gather the child to her bosom.

"What did you do to him?" she demanded angrily. "Does your dislike of him extend even to tormenting him while I'm asleep?"

Vandien went white at her words, but set his teeth against the answers that welled up in him. "Ki, it is the fever speaking, not yourself. No matter what my temper may be, well you know that it never extends to tormenting a helpless creature. Lie back and rest, for the sickness is upon us."

Ki glanced down at her arm and the blotches beginning to form there. She seemed to regard them with detachment, as if Vandien had but called her attention to a mosquito bite. She scratched sleepily at the front of her damp tunic. Then with a sudden intake of breath she hastily unpegged her tunic to expose her breasts. She gazed down in wonder upon herself. Vandien watched in bewilderment as she prodded her own breasts with gentle fingers.

"I have heard of this happening before, but I always deemed it a legend. But last night I must have dreamed true."

"What is it, Ki? Are you in pain?"

"There is milk in my breasts," Ki exclaimed in delight. "I can feed the baby! It will not die!" Eagerly Ki raised the child to position it against her. As soon as the nipple touched the baby's cheek, he turned hungrily to quest for it, seized on it, and began nursing ravenously.

"How can it be?" Vandien asked incredulously.

"The how does not matter, but only the fact that it is. Oh, I have heard that if a woman wants badly enough to suckle a child, she can, whether it is her own or not. But to be so blessed! He will not die, Vandien, he will live and grow and be as my own to me. He is mine and I am his. We are one." The last words Ki uttered in a sort of chant that trailed off into silence. She nestled back down ito the blankets. She closed her eyes.

Vandien looked down on her face in dumb agony. The fever blotches were beginning to assume their full scarlet hue. Later they would stand out as blisters upon her skin. But already she was lost to him, wandering in the dim world of her own overheating body.

The child continued to suck greedily. The sight appalled and disgusted Vandien. And once again he was at a loss to understand his own feelings. How could so natural a sight impress him as so unnatural? What bothered him so about this helpless child?

The baby opened its eyes. Was it chance that sent them wandering about the cuddy to seize on Vandien? Perhaps. But the eyes seemed to Vandien to be full of an older knowledge and an ugly triumph. They fixed upon him, and involuntarily Vandien stepped backwards before their glare. His head slammed painfully against a tall shelf when he did so, upsetting a crock of flour. In a choking dust it rained

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over his head and shoulders, to powder upon the floor. Vandien shook his head and dashed his hands across his eyes to clear them. It was then that the baby relinquished for a moment the nipple of Ki's breast.

It raised its large head to stare steadily at Vandien. From its rosy open lips came a long hiss, at once mocking and menacing. The sound, so strange a one to come from an infant, filled Vandien with cold. And now the baby was back, working hungrily at the breast. Vandien backed ungracefully out the small door of the cuddy, feeling ill, as if he had looked upon a sight unfit for the eyes of man.

The song was soothing Ki, reminding her of being at rest and complete. The baby tugged at Ki's breast and gently kicked its fat little feet playfully against her thigh. So peaceful here; such calmness, such clarity of thought. Through her the child was being fed; there was no higher purpose she might serve in this world. Her destiny was fulfilled. She need do no more than this. Vaguely it seemed to Ki that there had been a slight disturbance, that someone had tried to bother her a short time ago. But she could not now focus her mind on exactly who or what had disturbed her. No matter. It was gone now. Relax.

Sigmund snorted chidingly and rolled beseeching eyes back at Vandien. Vandien straightened up, letting the great hoof thud gently to the earth. It was, after all, the third time he had checked the beast's hooves for stray stones. He had also oiled all the harness, and drained, cleaned, and refilled the wagon's water cask. Now he had to admit to himself the reason for all his business. He did not want to go back inside that cuddy.

Several times he had reminded himself that Ki would probably welcome cold water to drink. He knew that someone should see to cleaning and changing the baby. But a double uneasiness held him back. To see Ki with the blotches upon her face was to confront again the death that hovered. And the sight of the baby filled him with an irrational loathing he could no longer deny.

He thought he heard a stir within as he jerked open the door of the cuddy, but no, Ki was still sleeping as he had left her. Only the babe roused to regard him with unblinking eyes. Was there hatred in those shining orbs, or only the crankiness of a baby roused from slumber? Steeling himself against that gaze, Vandien aggressively seated himself by Ki and raised her to a sitting position. She gulped greedily at the cold water when he wordlessly placed the mug to her lips.

"Ki?" She made no response, and the baby merely dug its smal fingers the tighter into her tunic to keep from losing his grip on her. "Ki, I think I had best remove the child for a while. You will rest the better, and he probably needs to be cleaned. Let me take him for awhile." Ki's half open eyes were dull; she made no answer. But the baby glared at Vandien and pulled itself closer.

"No," Ki moaned aloud as Vandien lifted the child. Relentlessly he tugged the cloth of her tunic from the infant grasp. Ki's hands opened and closed spasmodically, as if to reclaim the babe, but the grip of the fever was upon her and her strength was gone. "It is so cold without him. So cold and alone, so much without purpose....." Ki sighed out the words, falling into silence.

Holding the baby filled Vandien with a cold dread. And the smell! Not the odor of a soiled child, but a charnel house stench identical to that in Chya's wagon. The odor of death still clung to the child. Vandien wondered how Ki could have tolerated it so close to her.

A ginger check of its garments revealed no need for changing. Vandien frowned at it. Nothing was right about this child, and yet what was wrong? The baby continued to regard him with a curiously affronted look. Vadien felt he was being

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baited. The child did not cry. Did it know Ki was too weak to come to its aid? Was it biding its time? And, if so, for what?

Vandien placed it back on the bed beside Ki. But the avidity with which the child regarded her disturbed Vandien. After a moment's consideration, he pulled open a low drawer on the other side of the room. He removed from it sacks of dried beans and lentils and settled the baby firmly into the makeshift cradle. For an instant two sparks of anger seemed to light up its eyes; but then they closed. The baby slept. Vandien signed with relief. That was good. Now Ki could rest. And he could curledbeside
troubled him? Damn this indecisiveness! Let it be enough that he felt relieved to see them settled so, with Ki too weak to thwart his wishes. With a firm nod of approval for his handiwork, he left the cuddy.

Ki was a stubborn woman, full of hidden strengths, Vandien reminded himself. But still he frowned to himself when next he peered in the door of the cuddy, lamp in hand. Twice he had brought Ki more water, and each time found her as weak, or weaker than before. Her fever was devastating, seeming to sear the moisture from her body. Before this plague Vandien was helpless. Knowing that, he had come only to offer Ki more water before he himself sought a night's sleep by the fire. But now he shook his head and the uneasiness rose in him like cold water. He knew Ki was too weakened to rise. She was precisely as he had left her. But curled beside her, his mouth to her breast, was the child. In the shadows of the cuddy the child's eyes were dark and gleamed like wet black jewels. They focused unflickering upon Vandien.

Vandien swallowed seething rage. So weak, so pale was Ki. Only her rasping breath consoled him that as yet she lived. Damn, how could she have found the strength to seek out the baby? And what insanity would drive her to do so? Surely she must realize that for the child to survive, she herself must live. The child did not appear weakened at all; yet she would let it draw from her body the very sustenance she must retain to survive. Well, Vandien could change that.

As he put hands on the baby to remove it, Ki's eyes opened.

"Touch him not, Vandien. Get away from us, for his is mine and I am his. Get away!"

Vandien involuntarily jerked his hands back. He stared at Ki in horror. Her green eyes were wide and staring. Her voice was strained as the wind creaking through dry ropes. The strangeness of the words did not bother him half so much as the odd way she broke up the phrases, the half pauses as if she thought in one language and spoke in another. Vandien's hand shook as he picked up the mug of water. A dabble of water slopped over the rim to make small dots in the previously spilled flour on the floor. He glanced down at it in an odd detachment. He should clean it up. He should make Ki drink water. He should take the baby from her anyway. But he found himself backing out of the cuddy, driven to obedience by a compulsion he could not fight.

He found himself sitting and staring into the night fire. Sigmund was whiffling questioningly at his shoulder. With a jerk Vandien seemed to come awake again.

"I may be going mad," he suggested to the horse. "This may be the way the onset of the fever will take me. They are such small things that disturb me. But consider," he went on, stroking the velvety muzzle at his shoulder. "When first we find the baby, it should be hungry. But it refuses food. It seems to have not been weaned

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from the breast. But it is not the child of Chya's body. So how has it been fed, unless Chya too, has miraculously been blessed with milk? Such tiny things, Sigmund, but when taken together....."

Vandien found himself thinking of Chya's serene death face, so different from the agonized expressions on the other fever victims; yet strangely alike to Ki's when she nursed the child. Had Chya been a victim of the fever, or of something else? Unbidden, Trawn's last words rose like bubbles to burst in on Vandien's thoughts: "Friend. It killed Chya, and the fever takes me. Friend, not all that is small is young. Know that I speak truly, and do what must be done. Do what I could not do. For a snake is not a stick."

Strange words. Or were they? It seemed to Vandien that he had seen something, something close to hand, that would put an end to all his confusion. Something within the cuddy that would settle his mind. But what? If only he could shake off his worry over Ki and think clearly, it might come to mind. He put another stick of wood on the fire.

"Be one, be one, be one," was the song. Ki nodded. She would be one. She would be one, forever, with this small one. Together they would rest forever under the trees, listening to the sweet music that purred on like a river. Like a blessed cooling river. Ki smiled into the baby's eyes and fell into them.

The wagon door was stuck. It always stuck, from heat in the summer and cold in the winter. Vandien cursed it silently and then threw caution to the winds. If he woke Ki, so much the better. And of the other creature he might wake, he doubted that it ever slept at all.

He forced the door. Within was darkness absolute, but Vandien sensed eyes upon him. Instinct had won out over rationality, and Vandien felt no misgivings about what he might do. He backed out of the wagon door and returned in a moment with a dish lamp. Yes, the baby's eyes were upon him. They sparkled with victory nearly in their grasp and glared with hatred of this rival.

Vandien held the lamp higher and studied the spilled flour on the floor. There it was--the mark of something that had crept from the drawer to the bed. No foot print of Ki's where she had risen to seek the child. Only a trail such as a small being swaddled in cloth might leave if it went a-hunting. And there; a tiny footprint carelessly left undisturbed.

Vandien's smile was chilling. "I no longer suspect," he informed the creature. "I know."

It raised its head from where its small mouth had been fastened. A colorless slime trailed from tiny white teeth. What venom it put into Ki, Vandien could not know. But that which it took from her was more than milk. Ki was pale against the hides, and her eyes were closed. But her mouth moved and she sang mindlessly of the joinings that might be, and the sweetness of giving oneself to an elder wisdom. Against the unnatural paleness of her skin, the swollen blisters of the fever blotches were hideously apparent.

Vandien moved closer to the bedside and looked down upon the tiny creature. How to seize it troubled him. A snake is not a stick, though they may have resemblances. And this was no babe.

He seized it abruptly about its small chest. Instantly the little arms and legs fastened themselves about Ki's arm with a preternatural agility. Vandien tugged experimentally. The small head whipped about. Before he could jerk his hands away, the mouth snapped a chunk of flesh out of his arm. Exposed for an instant were the razor teeth it had kept cloaked behind its cherubic mouth all through Ki's

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attempts to feed it.

Vandien drew back, to stare at the rush of blood down his arm. A moment later the pain of the wound registered upon him and he gasped aloud. The thing chittered at him, and then flashed a grin of triumph only too human and virile. Vandien's heart pounded as he seized the fine hair atop its skull. He bent the head back, exposing that corded neck and the muscle development far beyond the growth of any infant. But the creature clung tenaciously and continued to meet his eyes. Contempt for Vandien flashed there, and certainty of victory.

With the speed of adrenalin fueled anger, Vandien's left hand raced in to seize the creature's throat. There, out of reach of its wildly snapping teeth, Vandien's fingers dug in.

His fingers squenched themselves into the unbabyish hardness of that throat. A shadow of doubt passed through the thing's eyes. It dug its monkey fingers into Ki's arm savagely. One stout little leg came loose and kicked at Vandien with surprising strength and swiftness. But Vandien's right hand was as swift as his left to seize the flailing leg. Back he bent it, and yet back, seeking to bring his right and left hands to meet behind the creature's back. He could feel the buckling and straining of bones and tendons. His own shoulder muscles cracked with his effort.

With a sudden squeal, the thing came loose from Ki, only to wrap its thick little arms and free leg about Vandien's left arm. Tiny thick nails dug in to rend his flesh. Bits of skin and flesh it shook from its fingers into Vandien's face, and then returned to dig again. Whatever it secreted under its nails sent hot wires of agony racing up Vandien's arm. He screamed in pain and terror. Panic and beserk rage engulfed him. He slammed the small being against the stout walls of the cuddy, against the rugged floor. Then, like a sea grooter cracking a crab, he smashed it against the edge of the sleeping platform. Over and over he slammed it, feeling thick little bones crack and splinter, feeling organs not human turn to jelly in his hands. In her sleep Ki worked her mouth spasmodically. Foam gathered at the corners of her lips to froth upon the bedskins.

Vandien found himself outside the wagon under clean moon light. He could not say when the thing had finally gone limp in his hands. But only shreds of it now dangled from his fingers. Turning he could see a path blazed with blood of his own and the creature's. There he had smashed it against the seat of the wagon; where the red smear was he had clubbed it against the high wheel. There was a splatter of red on the tree trunk to his right. Bits of something were splashed upon the rugged rock by the river brink.

Vandien shook the last of it from his fingers, and dropped face down into the water. His arm burned and screamed to him. He rubbed his face, and his hand came away with bits of flesh. His own, he prayed, as he splashed it from his skin. He pulled his fouled clothing from his body and lay down again in the shallow water. When the shivering of terror had subsided to a quiver along his bones, he rose.

Soon the cook fire was a bonfire. Vandien threw into it everything the creature had ever touched. The red glow reflected on his naked skin as he hurried about breaking camp. Sigmund came to the harness puzzled but willing. Sigurd was driven with curses and blows.

Vandien tugged his last tunic down over his head. Scrambling up on the box, he glanced hastily about to be sure he had missed nothing. A moist smacking noise drew his attention downward. A wet red rag of flesh was pawing at the tall wheel. It pointed its sightless, shapeless head at Vandien and bubbled out a chitter.

Vandien roared in horror and the greys lunged forward as one. There was a

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snapping and a slushing sound. Something went spinning off the wheel. Then the team hit their top stride and Vandien urged them on, heedless of the rocking and jolting of the wheels.

"KI? DO YOU see me, Ki? Ki?"

The world was bright, bright. Ki squinted her eyes against it, and brought up her arm to block it out. But her eyes focused on her arm and she stiffened at what she saw. She moaned and tried to pull away from Vandien's steadying arm.

"It's all right, Ki. The blotches are fading. You're past the worst. Lie back. Lie gently."

He eased her down. She felt about questioningly on the bed. The blankets about her were stiff, and empty.

"The baby?" she asked dully.

"Died." Vandien answered briefly. Her eyes were closed. She would not see the flicker of changing colors on his face.

"New bedding?"

"I have a few coins of my own, you know. And I thought it best, lest the old ones be a source of the fever. We are just outside Kaviani now. I rode Sigmund in to trade. Now rest, rest."

Ki lay back once more. "The fever dreams were beautiful," she murmured. And so ugly, she added to herself. She thought of the dream baby at her breast. Her mind shied away from the end of that dream. For his tiny smiling face had writhed and withered, to become the wrinkled visage of an evil and corrupt old man, and then to that of a tattering corpse thing, rags of flesh on brown bones. Through all the changes it clung to her, tried to draw her into itself, tried to bring her to join it. Ki shuddered.

"Cold," Vandien commented, and drew a soft new Shagdeer hide up over her. His left arm was bandaged from wrist to elbow.

"What happened?" she asked, touching it with anxious fingers.

"That damned Sigurd of yours. Bit me good and deep and I took an infection. Had to slash my arm to drain it. But it's healing now. The bandages can come off in a few more days."

"Oh," Ki said. "Fool. Can't even care for a team." Then, more worriedly, "Did you see to him? Did you take care of him afterwards?"

"I did with the body as the people of my birthplace do with such as him," Vandien said carefully. He was dreading the inevitable questions from Ki, and had formulated careful answers as he waited for the fever to leave her.

"Who? No, not the baby, dolt. Sigurd. He's temperamental. You can't let him get away with snapping at you, but you must be careful not to dampen his spirit." Why was Vandien going on so about the baby? Already it had faded to a pathetic little shadow in Ki's mind. Her only clear memory of it was when she first saw it in Chya's wagon. Even then she had known it was dying: that skull-like little face, the body crusted with sores. And the smell! She had thought the baby looked as if it had been dead for some time. But then she had lifted it, and that tiny questing mouth had tried to suckle at her arm. What had she done next? She could not remember; probably even then the fever had been upon her.

".... couldn't dampen his spirits if you threw him in the ocean with an anchor about his neck!" Vandien finished vehemently.

"What?" asked Ki vaguely.

"The hell." Vandien finished for her. ●

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M. Lindholm

M. Lindholm was born in 1952. She is a long time Alaska resident currently sampling life in Hawaii. Besides fantasy, she also writes children's fiction. This is the second time Ki and Vandien have found their way into print. The first time was in the story "Bones for Dulath" accepted by Jessica Amanda Salmonson for her anthology, *"AMAZONS" (DAW books).*

WHY WE CHOSE THIS STORY

We were drawn to this powerful character study of two people touched by evil. Their journey into horror is skillfully handled and resolved.

The HEADLESS HORSEMAN

by Darrell Schweitzer

IT WAS during the time when the Pennsylvania countryside explodes with color, in the fall when the hills and fields are a riot of yellows and reds and fiery oranges, when the farmers come to harvest what spring and summer have left them — that was when I met him. That was when it all began.

I was late, of course. I was supposed to be at the Brandywine Museum for the first showing of a newly discovered series of paintings by an 18th Century Pennsylvanian artist and represent the Historical Society at that function, but somehow it didn't look like I was going to make it there on time. For one thing, I had taken back roads all the way, cruising slowly to let the local color sink in, savoring every minute away from the bloated monstrosity somebody had the gall to name "The City of Brotherly Love." Besides that, I had stopped to talk with an Amish farmer. The Amish are very friendly people, really, and the guy waved, and as soon as he saw that I wasn't about to poke a camera in his face he called me over and we had a very pleasant conversation. That took time, though.

So there I was, late to a distinguished meeting but in no particular hurry, driving along a back country road between two cornfields, when I met the horse-

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Illustrated by Janny Wurts

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man. If I had been speeding I might have hit him. He seemed to just *appear* on the road in front of me. A little ways up ahead there was a grove of trees, and one of the fields ended for a while. He must have ridden out of that, but I certainly didn't see him. All of a sudden there he was, and that was all. I almost honked at him then, but from the way he was acting I knew something was going on. I paused cautiously, unsure of what to do. He sat still as a statue in front of me, mounted on a massive black stallion, holding out a leather bag in one hand as if he wanted me to take it.

I looked in my mirror and saw that no one was coming, put the car in neutral, set the emergency brake, and got out. It was then that I noticed how the fellow was dressed. He had knee breeches on, and huge white stockings. His shoes had brass buckles on them, and a sword hung at his side. I couldn't see his face, because there was a cape over it. He seemed to be sitting up straight, but I knew he had to be crouched under the cape because I couldn't see his head or even make out where his shoulders began.

There was absolute stillness about him. His horse didn't whinney or sputter, and he didn't say a word. There was no sound at all save for the purring of my auto engine. I wasn't sure what kind of gag this was, but I thought I'd might as well go through with it, now that we had gotten this far. So I took the bag. It was made of real leather and tied shut with a thong. Whatever was inside was round, about the size of a melon, and weighed a few pounds. I had a distinct feeling as I held it that something was very, very wrong.

Then the horseman suddenly sat up perfectly straight. He turned to me, threw back his cape, removed his ruffles, and unbuttoned the top of his collarless white shirt. I could see his chest then, and his neck, but not his head.

He didn't have any. It was gone, smoothly sliced off as if by an executioner's axe. The wound didn't look fresh. There was no blood.

He bowed to me, reined his horse, and galloped off in absolute silence. I didn't hear any hoofbeats. There was a strange, fluid-like quality to his movements, like something taken with a slow motion camera. He rode across the fields and he was gone, and as soon as he was out of sight the birds started chirping again, and a dog barked somewhere nearby.

Like I said, I had this feeling that something was very wrong. I looked down at the bag I was holding, the thong-tied thing of very old leather, and I felt sick. And scared. I didn't *want* to know what was in it, although of course I already did. I half ran, half stumbled up the road until I came to the trees, and there I found a sluggish, marshy stream. I threw the bag into the water and hurried back to the car. I tore out of there doing ninety, trying not to even think about what had happened.

I wasn't late for the showing after all.

THAT WAS how it all began. I had hoped the affair was over, though I should have known that I couldn't get off the hook that easily. I was still shaky throughout the ceremonies, but I managed to get by. It was as I was driving home — on the highway this time and doing sixty — that I happened to glance down, and there on the seat beside me was the bag. It didn't even look wet.

I almost lost control of myself *and* the car right there, but I managed to pull off onto the shoulder before going completely to pieces.

"Now calm down there. There's nothing that's going to happen to you as long as you're not British." It was the bag talking. The state I was in I was willing to believe anything.

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"Uh, I'm not British."

"Good, then let's get acquainted, shall we? I am Giles Hewlett, lately — although I'm not sure how lately, as I'll explain in a minute — of the Continental Army under General Washington, at your service, sir. And who might you be, who are to be my benefactor for this coming year?"

"David Styles. I'm with the Historical Society. What's this about the coming year?"

"Ah years, years, years. The good Lord knows how I try to keep track of them. How many has it been? You're an historical whatever, so you can tell me. I lost count a long time ago."

"How many years *since what?*"

"Since the *battle,* m'boy! Zounds, since I got killed! At Paoli. I trust you've heard of —"

"You mean the Paoli Massacre in the Revolution?"

"Massacre? You say it was a massacre? Too bad, those were all good lads. I wouldn't have known, because I got it myself too early to see much. Say, will you be a kind and Christian gentleman and take this bag off so I can see? I've been in the dark too long."

I jumped then, as if every muscle in my body decided it was time for a collective convulsion. I was almost able to accept the fact that I was talking to a leather bag, but to touch it, much less *open* it seemed more than I could stand.

"Well, come on! Come on! I won't bite ye!"

So I did. Giles Hewlett had a ruddy face with high cheekbones. His hair was long and tied behind his head with a ribbon, in the manner of his century. The color hadn't gone out of him, despite all he'd been through.

I felt sick again. I remembered an old legend I'd once written up as a filler for the Society's JOURNAL. It has to do with a soldier who'd had a dream the night before the Paoli Massacre and rushed to warn the Americans. He got there the same time the British did and got massacred himself. Ever since then he'd been riding around the countryside, giving his head to people every year on the anniversary of his death, and presumably reclaiming it once the terms of this ectoplasmic lend-lease were up. Or something like that. But there was one thing I was sure about. It was no story.

"That's better," the head/Giles continued. "Now, as I had asked, how many years has it been? It's been a while since anyone has taken me in like this, and I've been a little out of touch. You are a trusting soul, sir, and I appreciate it, though I do wish you would come out with the number of years."

"Well, this is 1980 and you died in, ah, when was it? We historians tend to forget dates sometimes. It's about two hundred years anyway."

"Two hundred years! And the world has changed so *marvelously.* If only Maggie could be here now."

"Who's Maggie?"

"A preacher's wife. Her husband was a very proper and strict man, and good to her I'm sure when he was around, but he was away a lot. He neglected her in favor of the pulpit so much that it was a sin, I daresay, a sin. I was, shall we say, setting matters right the night before the battle, and His Holiness showed up unexpectedly. I was just able to slip out the back window before he saw me. I rushed back to the camp, and as I got there the redcoats arrived. You know the rest."

"But I heard a different version of the story, about you having a vision —"

"Hellfire, lad! I didn't have any visions except one of Pastor You-Know-Who

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barging into the room before Maggie and I could make ourselves decent. Whatever you heard about me, put aside. I just told you what *really* happened."

"Some history will have to be rewritten."

"Lots of history will have to be rewritten with people like you writing it. But come on now, it's best we don't argue. We have twelve months of each other's company yet. There's nothing you can do to get rid of me, so why don't we become friends? I'll excuse you for throwing me in the swamp because you didn't know, but there had better not be any more incidents like that."

"Uh . . . okay, Mr. Hewlett."

"You can call me Giles. We'll be the best of chums before the year is out."

"Sure," I said as I restarted the car and pulled out into the traffic. A plan was forming in my mind. I knew what I had to do.

"Giles," I said after a minute, "Wouldn't you like a better view? You can't see anything down there on the seat."

"I'd be most grateful. I do want to see what marvels man has wrought over the centuries."

I rolled down my window, picked the head up, and said, "Take a good look. Twelve months indeed!" And before he could answer I threw him out, then reached over and tossed the bag after him. I glanced briefly into my rearview mirror and saw him bounce once or twice before he disappeared behind me. I pressed the gas pedal all the way down and violated both speed limits and common sense the rest of the way home.

BY THE time I pulled into the apartment yard I was almost positive that I was crazy. I was seeing things. I needed a drink desperately and I remembered a fifth of brandy I had been saving for a rainy day. I hurried up the outside stairs, fumbled for my keys, and let myself in. I headed straight for the refrigerator and opened it.

Inside, Giles was waiting for me. Don't ask me how he got there, but he *was* in my refrigerator, lying on a platter among the leftovers, looking remarkably like John the Baptist. I slammed the door shut, but he called through it.

"It's no good. You can't get rid of me. Didn't I tell you that once before? You have been most rude to me, sir, most rude. You are trying my patience."

Then the refrigerator door opened by itself, and Giles glared at me. "I will forgive you once again, since it has been so long since anyone has taken me in. But I demand, sir, that you promise on your word of honor, that you will not cast me away again."

I looked toward the door, then to the telephone. I thought of calling the police, then realized how futile that would be. What exactly would I *tell* them?

"Okay," I said. "You win. Now what exactly do you want?"

"Why, Mr. Styles, I merely want to be your guest and your friend."

SO, RELUCTANTLY at first, I allowed Giles to become my house guest. I got him a clean platter and continued to keep him in the refrigerator at nights. (I eventually found the bag behind the refrigerator.) He didn't seem to mind the cold, though, and it was as good a place for him to stay as any.

Things settled into a routine. Most of the time, Giles would watch television. He had wanted me to take him on a tour of Philadelphia, but with considerable difficulty I managed to dissuade him. It wouldn't do to carry a severed human head down a city street, I argued. It didn't matter if it could talk or not. The

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court would probably overlook that. People tend to ignore such things.

So my TV became his window to the world. He watched the news shows, movies, drama, and just about everything except situation comedies. Those he could not stand, despite the fact that we were living one.

No, I'm being unfair. I have to admit that Giles helped me a great deal in some of my research. His everyday knowledge of the 18th Century proved invaluable, even though I sometimes had difficulty explaining where I got my information. He wouldn't leave the television until the test patterns came on, but after that he was willing to talk as long as I wanted. He didn't seem to need sleep. We were up at all hours of the night discussing little known historical facts. Did you know that Washington had a terrible fear of spiders? One night some of his men placed a bucket of them in his tent and he came running out in the middle of the night waving his sword and yelling, "The British are coming! The British are coming!" until his orderlies could calm him down and give him a few stiff jolts of homemade whiskey. *That* isn't in any of the history books.

Basically, Giles was an ideal house guest. Aside from his fondness for television he made few demands of me. It really didn't cost anything to keep him either. So once I got used to him, and we made an unspoken agreement that I wouldn't try and dispose of him, we got along very well.

In fact things went splendidly until Pam showed up. Pamela Grey is my Maggie, only she isn't married to anyone. We've been friends for quite a while, and I may even love her, but I can't be sure. Somehow I hadn't thought of her when Giles came. I wasn't sure how I was going to introduce her to him, or even if I should. There are some things, after all, that Woman Is Not Meant To Know, and the presence of a severed head in her boyfriend's refrigerator is undoubtedly high up on the list.

Giles was watching an old Gary Cooper film when she drove up in her Toyota. Fortunately, I heard the gravel crunch and looked out just in time, and without saying anything more than, "My God! She's coming!" I turned off the western shootout that was on just then, and stuffed the protesting Giles into the refrigerator as Pamela began to ascend the stairs to the apartment. I had just slammed the refrigerator door shut when she burst in. The outside door wasn't locked.

"Hi, Dave. What's that you just put in the 'fridge?"

"Nothing. Nothing at all. I don't know what you're talking about."

"Oh, come on, hon. I saw you rush over and shove something in like you didn't want me to see it."

"There's nothing there. Honest."

"You're lying."

"Would I lie to you?"

"With me, yes. To me, yes also."

"I'm offended."

She tried to get around me, but I blocked her. She feinted, dodged, and tried to get around the other side, but I stopped her again, keeping myself between her and the refrigerator.

"If there's nothing there, then why can't I see?" She draped herself over me, her hands folded behind my head. She started chewing on my arm. She does that when she wants something. Says all that black and blue means she loves me.

"Just a little peek?" she whined. Chomp, chomp. "Come on, what's so terri-

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ble?" Chomp.

"All right, you win. There's a lemon pie in there. I didn't want you to spoil your figure."

"I'll go on a diet." With that she stomped down hard on my right foot. She's a big girl, and it hurt. While I was hopping around in pain she forced her way past me, said, "Sorry, I was clumsy," and opened the refrigerator door.

And screamed.

And turned to me like I was some three-headed flesh-eating gargoyle and screamed again.

And ran out of the apartment shrieking, "Murder! Help! Police! Murder!"

Twenty minutes later the police arrived.

THEY CERTAINLY made a big enough production out of it. Sirens wailing and lights flashing, a patrol car skidded to a stop in the courtyard of the apartment complex, spewing gravel everywhere. Two cops came thundering up the rickety wooden steps.

"Giles! What can I do?"

"Just hold 'em off as long as you can. Act naturally, as if nothing had happened. I'll think of something."

"That's easy enough for you to say."

There was no use arguing. I had to go along with him, so I sat down at the kitchen table and pretended to read the newspaper. I glanced over the lead story — some grisly thing about a machete murderer. The officers knocked, and before I could yell, "It's unlocked!" they were inside. They were both big guys, the kind that must have been football stars in school. I didn't feel like tangling with either of them, let alone both. This would have to be a peaceful confrontation.

They stared down at me, as if from some unfathomable height.

"Are you David Styles?"

"Yes I am. And what brings you here, may I ask? Care to sit down? May I get you something?" I had to be pretty nervous to rattle off lines like that.

"We have a complaint against you."

"*Really?* What's the problem?" I gave them my best shocked, I-have-nothing-to-hide-expression. God, I was so close to panic.

They looked at each other, unsure of how to phrase it.

"A head," said the shorter of the two after a pause.

"A head? A head indeed! It was probably attached to shoulders. They tend to go together, you know, for has it not been written that in the land of headless men the one-headed man is —?"

"Mr. Styles, we have a very serious charge against you. About the head, the lady said —"

"Head? What head? No heads here, except possibly myself." I reached over, took the top off the sugar bowl, handed it to the cop and said conspiratorially, "Hey, man. Wanna buy a lid?"

"I think we've got a psychopath on our hands, Nat," said the shorter policeman.

"Or else a wiseass," said Nat.

"Or a combination of both."

Then they turned serious, and the first one intoned in his very best Jack Webb voice, "Mr. Styles, a certain lady whose name shall remain confidential

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says she saw a severed human head in your apartment. We're here to look around, and maybe arrest you on suspicion of murder. Or more than that if you don't behave yourself."

"Murder? But I haven't murdered anyone in nearly three weeks. Surely any arms, heads or whatever that I might have lying around would have gotten mighty putrid by now. Do you smell anybody — I mean anything?"

"She said it was in the refrigerator. I think we'll just have a look." Nat made for the refrigerator. I panicked and tried to get up, but a heavy hand on my shoulder forced me back into my seat. "Just you stay put," said the other policeman.

I knew I'd had it. I'd done my best but that wasn't good enough, and I was finished. They'd find Giles and that would be that. When they saw my reaction they knew they'd found what they came for. Nat opened the refrigerator while his partner, still standing over me, looked on.

"Gentlemen," said the thing on the platter. "I am Giles Hewlett, at your service. Pardon me if my host seemed a little ungracious, but due to the irregularity of the —"

They both left in a hurry. They made no attempt to charge me, arrest me, search me, or even close the door behind them. Their car screeched out far more furiously than it had come in, only this time there were no lights.

I really felt sorry for those two. I wonder what kind of report they handed in.

THE WEEKS with Giles turned into months. I didn't see Pam any more, and I didn't miss her as much as I thought I would, so perhaps we weren't in love after all. Giles and I became the best of friends, or at least as close as we could considering the situation. Countless times I found myself wishing I had been born in his century, so I could have known him while he was, ah, living.

The following summer I overcame my fear of travelling with him, and the two of us went to Europe. I had some trouble getting him through customs, but I finally convinced the officials that he was made of plastic and a prop for my amateur ventriloquism act. ("Very realistic," someone remarked.) He was amazed by the way Paris looks now ("Where's the fat king?"), as he was with Rome, Madrid, Athens, and just about every other major European capital except London. He wouldn't go to Britain. I told him that the war had been over for a long time, and that America and the United Kingdom were allies now, but he was still one to hold a grudge.

"You're being ridiculous," I'd say.

"David, *you've* never rushed back from a lovely bounce between the sheets and then — swish! — off comes your head, or anything else. Now, have you?"

"Well, no . . ."

"Then who are you to judge?"

We flew back to New York without ever stopping in London.

And the months followed one another, wonderful months, growing months, learning months, full of discovery. But they made up a year, eventually. The best year of my life, but a year nevertheless. Which was the catch. One part of the legend which I had come upon in my researches in the first week, but which I refused to believe was, very simply, that anyone who accepts the head of the Headless Horseman of Paoli will die within the year. I procrastinated incredibly. It was the day before our "anniversary" when I finally asked him.

"Yes, David, I'm afraid it's true. It does seem to happen that way."

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"Well, why didn't you *tell* me?"

"Well, zounds, man! I thought you knew. Besides, you were having such a wonderful time I didn't want to spoil the fun."

I was silent for a long while after that. I paced back and forth in the kitchen. I banged my fists against the walls in frustration until the apartment shook. Giles could only follow me with his eyes, rolling them from side to side.

"Isn't there anything we can *do?*"

"Not that I know of," he said glumly.

"Can't we stop it, I mean him, I mean you? I'm confused. If you're you, then what's coming, in your body, I mean?"

"David, I have pondered that long and hard. I think I am on Earth still as a kind of purgatory, and the body is a demon or maybe some other kind of spirit sent to see me through it. Silent chap, really. Never said a word to me in all my two centuries."

"Your purgatory?"

"I was no saint, you'll recall."

"Well, how do you stop a spirit?"

"No idea."

"None?"

So I paced, and he rolled his eyes for a while. I looked at the clock on the wall. It was four-thirty. Was this my last afternoon, I asked myself? Was I doomed? What does a man do when a relentless demon is coming for his best friend's head (that being all of him there is to come for) and his own life?

"You could get an exorcist, I suppose," said Giles at last.

"A what?"

"Like on that weekday morning supernatural series, *Exorcise With Gloria.*"

"Gloria Grimm? I know her."

"You *know* her?"

"My mother went to her all the time to have her palm read and all that. She was very superstitious. Believed in ghosts and all that —" I paused, unable to finish, staring at Giles, who gave me a strange look.

"Well, don't just stand there gawking like a moron! Do something!"

I looked at the clock again.

"Yes! Her shop closes in half an hour. Come on!"

I stuffed him into a shopping bag, raced down the stairs, and all but leapt into my car, pulling out of the driveway in a storm of dust and gravel and leaves. I drove crazier than I ever had before, and I really believed in guardian angels or whatever then because I didn't run over anybody or get flagged down by a cop, for all the fire hydrants I smashed into (three) or streets I one-wayed the wrong way.

But I made it. The Malvern Bargain Plaza stands in the middle of nowhere desperately trying to become somewhere. Fortunately, business is so bad the access roads are never clogged. At five of five I screeched into the parking lot, grabbed Giles, nearly *flew* out of the car before it had even come to a full stop, and raced breathlessly into the enclosed mall.

Gloria Grimm's little shop was between the shoe store and Gimbel's. It had been there before the shopping plaza was even built. Rumor had it the developers had tried to run her out, but *something* had happened and they built the place around her. There she remained, doing a modest but steady business, driving out devils, reading tea leaves and the like. Above her door was a blinking

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neon sign: GLORIA GRIMM, GYPSY WITCH.

She was a lot older than I'd remembered her, in her eighties at least. There she sat behind a black satin covered table, frail and wrinkle-faced, but stiff and tough-looking as an ancient oak, peering into a glowing crystal ball.

"Silence my son. Be calm. The spirits are about to speak. Besides that, it's nearly closing time."

"Gloria — Miss Grimm. It's me, Davie Styles. Remember?"

She looked up, and a broad smile cracked her face.

"Yes! How you've grown! I remember when you sat on my knee! You look so flustered. What's the rush?"

"You gotta help me!"

"Oh, but it's so late, and I'm tired. I'm not as young as I once was, Davie. Couldn't you come by tomorrow morning, and we'll have some nice hot chocolate, and you can tell me all about it?"

"It won't wait." And in a nearly incoherent fashion I tried to explain it all in one sentence, which was garbled, as was the next one, explaining that, and the next, and the next.

"If I could put in a word here," said Giles.

She looked at the bag in astonishment.

"You throwing your voice, Davie?"

I couldn't say anything, so I reached in and took Giles out.

"How do you do, Madame?" he said. "I watch you on the television regularly."

She reached under the table for the switch to turn the crystal ball off.

"My God! It's real! Oy vey. I just work here, you see. It's a living. I want to retire to Florida like everybody else, but this! Davie, what have you gotten yourself into?"

Giles explained it. All of it. Calmly, clearly.

"Well, well," she said, shaking her hands nervously. "I'll do what I can. I . . . I have connections who might help."

"Please do whatever you can," said Giles. "And quickly, I pray you."

"Yes . . . yes . . . Such a nice boy, too."

She took a telephone from under the table and dialed furiously.

A pause. "Oh damn . . . she died, and I haven't got the new number." Dialed again. "Hello . . . What? Not until sundown? Well, leave a message! It's Gloria Grimm. That's *G* as in Gottendammerung, *L* as in Lilith . . . Yes, yes, okay . . . Damn answering service!" Another call and: "Yes, I'm fine. How are you? And little Greymalkin? Oh, did you leave out a bowl of milk for Nyarlathotep? He gets very angry if you don't. Look, I'm in a bit of a sticky situation. You remember Davie Styles? Uh-huh . . . Look, can you round up everybody and get them over here right away? No, you don't have to file a flight plan! Thanks very much, dearie."

So we waited. Gloria marveled at the sight of Giles and questioned him endlessly about ectoplasmic engrams, life beyond the veil, and the like. They could have gone on all evening while I sat there scared and forgotten, but then the guests began to arrive.

First there was another old, old lady, dressed all in black, wearing a conical hat, who set a broom made of twigs against the wall so gingerly you'd think it was a rare and delicate work of art. Madame Midnight, Gloria called her. Then

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there was a teenaged girl, barefoot and wearing jeans and a tee-shirt, but with an owl perched on either shoulder. A tall, thin woman in white didn't seem to arrive. The air grew blurry for a second, and there she was. An elderly, bearded man came in a box, which seemed to float into the shop by itself. Three United Parcel men followed with three more boxes, none larger than a violin case. They adjourned to a back room. I heard scraping and dry rustling, then the "Our Father" being recited backwards, after which they left, taking the boxes with them. After which a tall, pale fellow in evening dress joined us at the table. A dwarf dropped from the ceiling.

At last there were twelve of them, including Gloria.

"We're all here," she said, "except the Black Man."

"No coven would be complete —" But before Gloria Grimm could finish her sentence, an enormous gentleman of the Colored Persuasion, wearing top hat, tux, tails, and spats, with a cane over one arm and a monacle in one eye strolled in, shutting the door behind him. He smiled broadly.

"Well, my children, all of us are present, I see."

He set a briefcase on the table. On the lid, printed in huge letters was a comment:

THE GREAT JUMBOLO *IS* THE GREATEST. THERE IS NO OTHER.
— BARON SAMEDI

On the inside was a rave review from the NEW YORK TIMES leisure and voodoo section.

"Shall we begin?" said The Great Jumbolo.

I have never seen such a sight in all my life. The Black Man shaped two lumps of wax into vague semblances of human heads. He placed Giles between them. He made me sit forward with my head down on the table, next to the other three.

Then he began a prayer or invocation. The others joined in, chanting, ranting, yelping, dancing around the table with their hands joined. At one point everybody was wearing black goatskins and rams' horns, but the air was so thick with incense I couldn't see much. It went on all night. I felt myself dozing off, but Jumbolo nudged me.

"No mon, you must stay awake, or else your soul turn into, how you say it? *Pretzel.*"

The shadows seemed alive. Some of them had wings and were flapping around above me. There was a flash of lightning and a clap of thunder. That's it, I told myself. Now the security guards hear us. This will be hard to explain. But they didn't come.

I only knew it was morning when the muzak started and the fountains outside were turned on. It was a relatively quiet part of the ritual, and I could hear the water splashing.

"Oh dear," said Gloria. She fumbled under the table, got out her crystal ball, hooked an extension cord to it, and plugged it into a wall socket. "He's coming. He's crossing the parking lot now."

I turned and looked, and there, inside the crystal ball, was the image of the horseman gliding across the pavement between the lamp posts.

"I hope we've done enough," said the dwarf. "It would be a shame to ruin such good work."

"I have the thing you need," said The Great Jumbolo. He took a flask out of his briefcase, opened it, and a wisp of white smoke floated in the air, not going

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anywhere. "It is a tame spirit," he said.

For some reason I *could* hear the horseman this time. His horse's hooves chattered on the polished floor. He was inside the mall now.

"Quick!" hissed Jumbolo. He touched my head, Giles, and the two wax models. He snapped a finger and pointed, and the white cloud drifted into the ear of one of the wax heads, and the thing began to melt and shift. I was too numb with astonishment to be surprised by anything at this point, so I took it in stride that the thing became a perfect replica of Giles, as did the other one. But I was upset, perturbed, and even terrified when I found myself looking down on my own body, seeing how I had slumped over the table unconscious. I was drifting among the winged shadows and incense fumes. I felt another presence. Somehow I knew it was Giles, drifting with me. I floated around the room, as if my head was weightless and I couldn't turn it. Sometimes I saw only the ceiling, but sometimes I was looking down.

I was looking down on myself, on Giles, Jumbolo, and the rest when the Horseman came in. He knocked once, and the latch on the door dropped away. The knob didn't turn, but the door swung open all by itself. In he came. Everybody except Jumbolo backed away from the table. Gloria hovered in a far corner, but the rest of them retreated into the back room. Only the Black Man faced the spectre face to . . . neck. He was magnificent.

"Looking for something, mon?"

The Horseman was silent. He approached the table. Suddenly the eyes of all three disembodied heads opened. They were so alike now it was hard to tell which was Giles and which were the imitations.

Which was exactly what was intended.

"I am the real Giles Hewlett," said the first. "Take me."

"No, *I* am the real Giles Hewlett."

"They're both lying. It's me."

The Horseman paused, and as he did, Jumbolo grinned a wide grin and shuffled the heads like nuts in a shell game.

"Which one, mon? You choose."

The Horseman stood there, put his hand to where his chin should have been, and puzzled the situation out. All the while I was drifting dizzily above, alternately looking down, up, and sideways.

At last he pointed to the middle head.

"It's yours," said the Black Man.

Then he went over and lifted me up by the hair. Even though I wasn't in my body, I felt the chill of his touch.

When I saw my face, I felt sick. I looked terrible. My eyes were rolled up so that only the whites showed. I was pale and slack-jawed. Drool ran down my chin.

"Dead," said the Black Man. "No soul in body."

The Horseman let go and my forehead banged against the tabletop. Without a word, he left.

"Come on out. He's gone," Jumbolo called, and soon the whole coven was seated at the table again. Two heads remained. One of them was turning into plain wax again. The other remained — Giles?

The incantations began. It was as if a sudden gust of wind blew through the place. Suddenly I was whirling all around. I was falling. The shop was gone, and

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I was high above a dark valley, swooping down between two snow-covered mountains which glowed from a sunset somewhere behind them. The crags below glowed a sullen, furnace red. I was in the hereafter, beyond life. The landscape all around was so desolate. I wanted to cry out, but I was just a cloud without a voice.

But then a wrinkled, bony hand on the end of an arm a hundred miles long grabbed me by the scruff of the neck and dragged me back to this world. I saw the room again, blurry and swaying, and blacked out.

I awoke slowly, numb all over. I wanted to touch my face with my hand to assure myself I was still there, solid once more, but nothing touched.

I opened my eyes. At first I thought I was buried up to the chin in the middle of a vast plain of black velvety sand. Then, no, a hospital bed. With black sheets?

I saw the giants looming over me and I screamed.

"Hey! What is this? Help! You can't do this to me!"

And I saw *myself* sit up groggily, open my eyes, and look around in amazement.

"Zounds . . ."

The voice sounded terribly familiar.

"Giles!"

"David!"

"What are your doing in my body?"

"That's my head you're wearing!"

It was true.

"Oops," said The Great Jumbolo.

"Oops," said Gloria Grimm.

"Uh?" grunted the dwarf.

"I'm sorry, Davie," said Gloria Grimm. "These things happen. It's not our fault. We had to get you out, so you'd be dead and he'd leave you alone."

"Well, get me back in!" For the first time the odd thought came to me that a loose head should not be able to speak, lacking lungs, but by now I had faith in the supernatural. "Do what you did *again*, and put me back in my own body."

Jumbolo picked up the wax head, which was no more than a formless lump now.

"Too late," he said.

"Yes," said Gloria. "I'm afraid the new fitting has hardened. To undo one of these would take a long, long time."

"How long?"

"About a hundred years. But I'll work on it."

I BELIEVE she will. She's such a sweet old lady. As for the others, they left as unobtrusively as they'd come. I suppose I had to thank them for saving me, so I did, but in truth I wasn't too pleased with the lot of them. Unfortunately there are no malpractice suits in magic.

"Well," said Giles-in-my-body after they'd all left. "I shall enjoy being a whole man again. Really I shall!" And he walked over to the door.

I may have been scared before, but this was the one instant of hopeless, despairing terror.

"*Giles!* You can't . . . just leave me!"

He paused. He looked hurt and ashamed. I don't know what he was thinking,

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but he must have reconsidered, or understood what he was doing, or something.

"No, I *never* —! You're my friend!"

He put me in the shopping bag. Gloria Grimm drove us home in my car.

We had a hundred years to kill. Giles, an immortal spirit of sorts, cannot die. He sustains my body without aging it. In his head, made of ectoplasm or whatever, I can last forever too.

The world gets stranger and stranger. He lacked so many of my everyday skills; he could never pass for me. He couldn't drive a car, do my job, sign my name to a check. So we had to give up the apartment, sell everything, and go on the road. He could have taken the money and run off, leaving me holding the bag (in the bag), so to speak, but he never did. We went on the road together. Our adventures were endless. Eventually we began working for a circus, travelling from town to town, giving "disconcertingly convincing" performances of ventriloquism, or so the press said.

Waiting a hundred years, for Gloria Grimm, who will surely last that long, to set things right.

Did you know the shows keep logs, just like ships? They do.

Topeka ahoy! ●

Darrell Schweitzer

Here's another author who has appeared quite often in both magazines lately with: "Never Argue with Antique Dealers" (January, 1980 *Fantastic);* "The White Isle" (April and October, 1980 *Fantastic);* Interviews with Clifford Simak (February, 1980 *Amazing),* Bob Tucker (May, 1980 *Amazing)* and Ron Goulart (August, 1980 *Amazing).* He says he's running dry of biosketch material, but we did get the following additional remarks:

"I was originally inspired to write by a bad first sale in Fred Pohl's *IF.* I was 14 at the time and said, "Gee, I can do better than that." I remember confidently telling a friend that the story (my first effort) would be published. I later learned that this sin is called *hubris.*

"I suppose the person who helped me more than anyone else at the beginning was W. Paul Ganley. I sent him bales of awful stories for *WEIRDBOOK* from the very beginning of that magazine's existence, back in 1968. (I turned 16 that August.) It was my intent to break down his resistance by sheer volume. Ah, I'm sure many editors would like to see lots of bright kids strangled for that thought. Anyway, he wrote me long and patient letters explaining why some of the stories were rotten, and taught me many of the fundamentals of storytelling. He was ultimately the first person to buy anything from me in any way, shape or form (1969). That did my ego good, but the letters he wrote probably did more to make me a writer. I also sent him awful drawings, but he did not make me an illustrator, which I suppose demonstrates that he was patient but not super-human."

He also sent this editor some of those (ahem) drawings.

"Enough for now. In my next blurb, I'll explain the meaning of life and begin expounding my mystical doctrine to the initiates of the Inner Circle of Blurbreaders..."

WHY WE CHOSE THIS STORY

Schweitzer has a good deal of fun, imagining the meat around these bones of an old legend (the same character, minus head, appears in Marvin Kaye's "Amorous Umbrella" in this issue). The unexpectedness of a severed human head carrying on impertinent and demanding conversations and relationships, and the protagonist's eventual acceptance of the entire bizarre situation, make for good entertainment.

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Girl of My Dreams

by Paul Dellinger

HER NAME was Valinda. I knew it as surely as the fact that I'd never seen her, until she took form in my dream. Oh yes, I was fully aware that I was dreaming, even though the dark beauty of Valinda's eyes and hair and the smooth curve of her cheek seemed more real to me at that moment than any movie star or beauty queen I'd ever interviewed in the flesh.

Vaguely, I found myself wondering how my subconscious could create such a lovely creature. Then I tried to shove aside such useless speculation and get back to the dream, to see what direction it might take. Unfortunately, it was too late. Something had roused me. I opened my eyes reluctantly to see what.

It turned out to be a pair of whats — big men, judging by their silhouettes against the city lights outside my window. Before I could say anything, one of them flashed a blinding light in my face.

"It's him," one of them said. Then I felt a sharp sting on my upper arm, and suddenly it seemed like a good idea to go to sleep again. This time it was a dreamless sleep.

I thought I was dreaming when I came out of it, though, and focused on the half-dozen grim faces staring down at me. My mouth felt dry, as though I'd tied one on the night before with some other reporters on our little tabloid. I tried to sit up and found at least three pairs of hands saying no.

"So you're Craig Norcross," a heavy-set balding man with bulldog jaws said, making it sound like being me was a crime. "Just how did a fiction-writer like you learn of our little group?"

I didn't much like his term for the kind of writing I did. Granted, maybe we did sensationalize the facts a bit to perk up our readers — like my series about NASA hushing up the discovery by Apollo astronauts of flying saucers on the

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moon, or a colony of Bigfoot creatures being hidden by hippies in southern California. Creative journalism, we called it. Never let the facts stand in the way of a good story.

"Look here," I said, "whatever you guys want, couldn't it wait 'til morning? If it's a story idea, come by the office and we'll talk it over —"

But he wasn't listening. He motioned to someone I hadn't seen, as his men dragged me to my feet. "He is the one, isn't he, Valinda?"

Even before I turned, I knew — somehow, I knew — I was about to see my dream girl, whoever she was. And there she stood, staring at me with those great, dark eyes. I was surprised to find her almost as tall as myself, but everything else about her was pleasantly familiar — the glossy black hair flowing down over flawless shoulders, the thrust of her breasts against her low-cut blouse, the flashing curve of a tanned leg in the slit of her long, colorful dress. She looked like the most beautiful gypsy girl you could imagine.

"Yes, Mr. Chambers," she replied in a soft, subdued voice. "I think — perhaps he might even be the key . . ."

"Right. Lock him up with the others," the man called Chambers said. "Maybe he'll talk after a few months. In any case, he can't shoot anyone now."

"Shoot anyone?" I exploded, trying unsuccessfully to jerk my arms free. "I don't want to shoot anyone! I've never even thought about shooting anyone!"

"Of course you have," Chambers said, smiling for the first time. "Me."

I was still trying to figure that out when they tossed me into a barracks-like room and locked the door behind me. There were two rows of bunks, some of them occupied, and a bathroom at the other end of the room. No windows, and just the one door. What the hell was going on here?

"Welcome to purgatory," said the nearest man, swinging his legs over the side of his bunk and standing up. He was perhaps in his twenties, with unkempt brown hair and a good start on a beard. "This is where you're supposed to contemplate your sins. Take your pick of the beds. You're only the fourth one of us, so there are still plenty to go around."

The other two men were up, now, and coming my way. I felt like the new kid on the block, only I had no idea where this particular block was.

"My name's Vic Crowe, if it matters," my greeter said. "The gentleman with the perpetual scowl is Mr. Grady, and the one with the glasses is Mr. Heath."

I gave my name. Grady merely grunted, but Heath pumped my hand up and down. "Terrible affair, Mr. Norcross, simply terrible. Mobsters, pretending to represent some elite police force —"

"You think they're pretending?" said Grady. "All their talk about stopping the Oswalds, Sirhans and Ellsworths before they do their thing — it's just the kind of screwball idea they would come up with."

"Mr. Grady has no love for policemen," Crowe said. "He has had some misunderstandings with them about the ownership of certain jewelry —"

"Don't be a wise punk. Anyway, I wouldn't have tried for that hunk of ice they said. It's out of my class."

"Of course not," Heath agreed. "None of us planned those terrible things they claimed. None of us!"

Crowe seemed to be enjoying his role as my mentor. "Mr. Grady was supposedly going to relieve one of our museums of the Ogden diamond, on loan from England. Terrible international incident, and all that."

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"Okay, smartass," Grady snapped. "Suppose you tell him why they grabbed you? Gonna knock off one of their strongarm boys, right?"

"I must admit the idea's starting to appeal to me."

"It's all insane," Heath said. "Taking the word of that sideshow girl over someone like myself —"

"Sideshow girl?" I said. "You mean Valinda?"

"Who else?" said Crowe. "She's supposed to be a mindreader, if you can believe that. With a body like hers, she'd find it simple to read the mind of any normal male."

"Well, they can't fool me," said Heath. "Using a carnival trickster so our real accusers can remain hidden . . ." He wandered back to his bunk, mumbling to himself.

"What's he supposed to be planning?" I whispered to Crowe.

He chuckled. "A crime of passion, no less. Our glamorous mindreader claims he wants to murder his wife."

I looked at Heath, sitting on his bunk now with his head in his hands, the picture of defeat. "He hardly seems the type."

"I don't know," said Crowe. "Since they told us our families and friends have been made to think we've died in various accidents the goons have faked, he's been talking sometimes like he thinks she somehow engineered all this to get him out of the way."

"You don't seem particularly concerned about all this," I observed.

He shrugged. "I can't believe they can keep us here forever. And I know damned well I was never planning to shoot anybody."

"That's what I told them about me," I said. "It didn't cut any ice with them at all—"

The door opened again, and we all turned to look. Standing there, holding a big revolver as though she didn't know what to do with it, stood Valinda all by herself.

"Quickly," she said, in that soft voice of hers. "I took this from my security guard and struck him with it, but soon they will find him and know —"

They knew already. The clanging of an alarm galvanized us all into movement. All four of us ran through the door and into a hallway. Crowe had the presence of mind to relieve Valinda of the pistol and we pounded up a stairway.

"We're below ground here," Crowe panted. "When we get to ground level, split up. Get to a newspaper, or a cop, or a Congressman, anyone who might be able to do something about this crazy setup."

I didn't take the time to tell him I was a newspaperman, of sorts. If the tabloid where I worked printed the story, readers might be entertained by it, but nobody would believe it. For the first time, I wished I worked for a real newssheet.

We were running so fast when we hit the top of the stairs that we almost passed two men before we realized it. I couldn't tell whether they or we were more surprised. One reached under his coat, then staggered backwards as a nasty snapping sound exploded to my right.

I turned that way, and saw Crowe's ashen face. It was the first time I'd seen anything shake him up. "I — I didn't mean to —"

More shots ripped back at us. With surprising strength, Valinda shoved me to the floor. Crowe wasn't as fast. When he dropped down beside us, it was with a limp thud.

She pulled at my sleeve. I suddenly realized I was still wearing my pajamas.

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"Come," she said. "Before they close in."

I scrambled up, grabbing the revolver jarred from Crowe's hand. As we ran, someone behind us shouted a command. "Don't shoot, dammit! She's with them."

Valinda seemed to know where she was going, so I followed, my bare feet slapping the floor as I ran. When I saw more men ahead of us, I brought the pistol up automatically and found myself aiming it right between the cold gray eyes of Mr. Chambers himself.

He froze in front of us, and seemed to shrink in size as the blood drained from his face. "Get back," I said. "Let us by —"

"Gimme that!" Grady wrenched the weapon from me impatiently. "Anyone tries to stop us, your sexpot here gets a bullet. Understand? Now, get out of the way!"

Chambers and the others backed off quickly as we went by, Grady clutching Valinda's bare shoulder in a grip that made her wince.

"Take it easy," I said. "She's the one who got us out, remember?"

"Yeah," Grady said. "And once we get clear, I'm gonna put those talents of hers to work where they'll really do some good."

"No, Mr. Grady," Valinda said quietly, seeming unconcerned about the gun at her back. "You will reach the beautiful diamond you desire, but not with me."

"You know everything, don't you?" he snarled angrily. I could see his knuckles whiten around the pistol. "You're the one who does it," he breathed, as though making an intuitive discovery. "You predict it, and then you make it happen —"

I knocked his arm up as the pistol went off. The sound echoed down the hallway and a light fixture shattered above us. I hustled Valinda around a corner before he could get off another shot. I'd lost sight of Heath altogether, and wondered if he'd gotten out.

For the next few frantic moments, Valinda guided me through the corridors to a garage. "The little blue car," she said, pointing to a Volkswagen near the door. "The keys are in it."

We shot from the garage onto a crowded city street at midday. "Where to?" I asked, and Valinda gave me directions that eventually took us out of the downtown area and through several subdivisions, and finally into a countryside that seemed almost empty except for a farmhouse every few miles. We pulled off the road and between some tall trees where, I hoped, the car would be hidden from any passers-by.

With our flight halted for the moment, I became acutely aware of Valinda's nearness, her warmth, her lips within touching distance of mine. I barely managed to hold back. "Where are we?" I asked.

"The carnival where I worked was using this site," she said, "when Chambers and his men raided it, claiming it was a front for a narcotics operation. That was their excuse for seizing me."

"You were kidnapped like the rest of us?"

"They said it was justified in my case, in the national interest. I spent hours each day with their polygraph machines, describing in detail the things I had — seen."

As she spoke, her long slender fingers began undoing the buttons on my pajama shirt. I started to say something, then thought better of it.

"What they never understood," she breathed in my ear, "was that some phy-

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sical contact was necessary for my talent to work. What I saw came to me only because it involved Mr. Chambers or the men around him. It was their futures I saw, not those of the people they put out of the way. But you — I saw you, before, perhaps in my own future . . ."

She had finished with my shirt by now, and was taking care of the rest of my flimsy wardrobe.

"What about Grady?" I said. "You saw his future, you said —"

"Yes, when he grasped my shoulder. He will have gotten away, too, but not unscathed. And he will reach his coveted diamond, because its guards will run to seek a doctor for the wounds he brought with him. Fatal wounds."

I had other questions, but this seemed a ridiculous time to ask them. Her mouth found mine and clung to it. Our bodies seemed to merge, from head to toe. Her tongue probed my mouth as though it would extend its sweetness into my very soul, and my hands played over the soft curves of her body until I could contain myself no longer, and clasped her to me in a paroxysm that left us both limp.

We had left the car at some point, and lay side by side on the cool grass, the warmth of her lithe body against mine. I touched her face, gently, and my fingers came away damp.

"Valinda? Why are you crying?"

Again she clung to me. "I had hoped I had not seen correctly, this once. But now I know . . ."

"You know — my future now?" But she wouldn't answer, not with words — only with a renewed surge of passion, as once more we brought life to that empty countryside.

I awoke with the sound of crickets in my ears, again wondering what was real and what I was dreaming. It was night, but there was a moon and it cast enough light for me to recognize Chambers and the other men staring down at me once more.

I sat up, abruptly aware that I was wearing no clothes at all, not even my pajamas.

"Relax, Norcross," Chambers said. "I don't know how, but somehow we had you wrong. She must have tricked us, in spite of the lie detector. Besides," he added, permitting himself a slight smile, "I can see you're unarmed. Tell me, where is she?"

I just glared at him. "You had me wrong, huh? What about the others? Were you wrong about them, too?"

"Unfortunately, no. Crowe did kill one of my men. Grady would have stolen the Ogden Diamond if he'd lived long enough. We caught up with Heath, but not in time. His wife — well, she'd thought he was dead, we'd made it look that way, and she was with another man —"

"And it happened just as Valinda said it would," I finished for him. "Right?"

"We've got to get her back, Norcross. You don't realize what she could mean to law enforcement, maybe even to world peace. If I can convince our government to use her talents to the fullest extent — imagine, Norcross, no more surprise attacks in wartime! No assassination plots, no terrorist raids. We'd know everything in advance, we could stop it before it happens."

"And you'd be the first director of the nation's Thought Police, right? Wake up, Chambers. You can't arrest people for thinking about a crime. And your track record on prevention hasn't been so hot."

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"We'll make it work," he assured me. "Once we get Valinda back, and find out how she tricked us concerning you. We'll make it foolproof —"

"And make Valinda your prisoner for life, I suppose. She's not a machine, Chambers. She's flesh and blood. You've no right!"

"Yes, I imagine you've discovered that she's flesh and blood, all right," he said, looking at my state of undress. "All right, we'll find her without you. Never mind, Wilkens," he said as one of the men started to handcuff me. "Leave him alone. At this point, he's about the only one I'd trust not to take a shot at me. He had his chance, remember?"

They spread out, moving like shadows through the trees away from where I sat on the ground. I tried to keep my eyes on Chambers. And then I saw the other figure approach him.

"So you decided to help us look after all, Norcross —"

Chambers stopped, probably realizing that I couldn't possibly have donned my familiar pajamas that fast. And then he may have seen that it was a woman wearing them, even if she was my height. But by then it was too late. Valinda had grabbed the pistol from his belt. It went off before the struggle could even start, and Chambers slumped to the ground.

Two more flashes erupted from the bushes nearby and cut Valinda down, as well.

"Valinda," I said, fighting back tears as I knelt beside her. "Why?"

"It was the only way," she said, her voice hardly more than a whisper. "I had to make him think it was you, to get close enough . . ." She coughed. "You see, the future is not unalterable. When they made me describe what I saw — they themselves initiated the very actions that shaped those events."

"But you told them it was me."

"When they tracked you down and brought you before me, I wasn't sure. But when I lay with you, I could see it all, in every detail — that it was myself I had seen in Chambers' future. It was a great evil, this idea of his. He was the driving force behind it. He had to be stopped . . ."

Her head dropped onto my arm, but she managed to speak once more. "I could simply have killed myself — but they would only have found another like me . . ."

"Another?" I said. "There are others?"

But Valinda was gone.

I don't know how long I huddled there on the ground, cradling her body in my arms. Finally I became conscious of Wilkens, one of Chambers' men, standing over me.

"The chief's dead," he said. "I guess I'm in charge now."

"In charge of what?" I asked numbly.

"The search. You heard her. We'll find others, now that you and I know they exist. You'll have to corroborate what she said, Norcross. Otherwise, the people who approved this venture would think I was just trying to keep my job in a project that's reached a dead end."

"Sure," I said, getting up. "I'll come with you."

"Just back me up when we reach Washington," he said. "This thing can still be as big as Chambers hoped. Can't you see it? No more secrets. Nothing can stop us."

"Yes, I can see it," I agreed. And I could. This one time, I could see the future

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as well as Valinda. Wilkens would report everything to those doubting government officials. Then he'd trot out his trump card, me. Why, yes, gentlemen, I would say, Mr. Wilkens and I are collaborating on a sensational story about this for my paper . . .

I was really glad I didn't work for a real newssheet. ●

Paul Dellinger

As a youngster growing up in Woodstock, Va. during the 1950s, I was able to read practically every sf novel that came out — in paperback, at least. Paperbacks were only a quarter then, and there was so little sf being published compared to now that the discovery of a new one at the local newsstand was a cause for celebration.

The magazines were in my price range, too, but not hardbacks — even at the lower prices offered by the Science Fiction Book Club in the ads in those magazines. The club described one particular book with a synopsis that took my fancy — Wilson Tucker's *Wild Talent* — and each time I read its plot summary I wished to have it.

One day I happened on a paperback titled *Man from Tomorrow* which looked science-fictiony enough for me to risk a quarter. I was well into it before I realized it was Tucker's book with a different title.

Later I was similarly entranced with James Blish's *Jack of Eagles*, Eric Frank Russell's *Sentinels of Space*, and Frank Robinson's *The Power* which George Pal made into a movie in 1968 and which I've found much more enjoyable than all the more recent occult-based films that played around with some of the same ideas. The movie did change Robinson's view of how absolute power corrupts absolutely. Does it always? This story is another try at answering that question.

WHY WE CHOSE THIS STORY

Girl of My Dreams

This man writes a good yarn, laced with action, mystery, romance and in this case, a touch of psi. Norcross is a likable character, the kind of guy you can depend on in a pinch and one who endears himself to you for not taking himself too seriously. Rueful about his own brand of journalism, he nevertheless is able to put it to good use in the end. All in all, we come out with some laughs, some tears and a feeling that powers such as Valinda's may not be so easy to exploit, after all. Dellinger has recently appeared with "The Cliffhanger Sound" (January, 1980 Fantastic) and "Return to Mars" (May, 1980 Amazing).

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FANTASTIC FACTS

Main Street Stars

by Britton Bloom

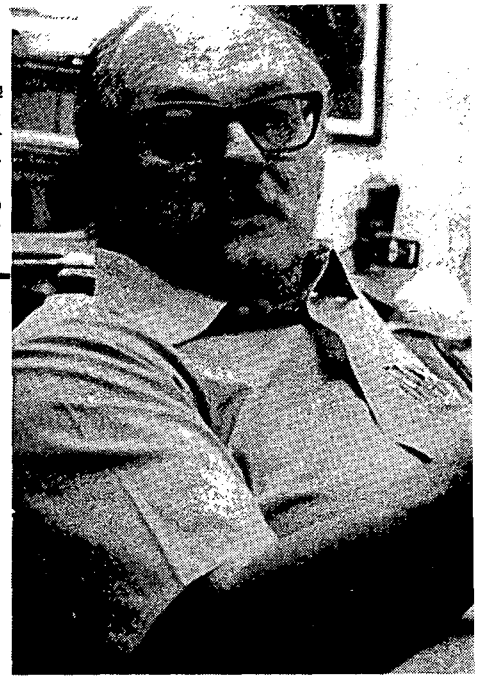

Photo by Anna Gail

Dr. Raymond White

LIGHT POLLUTION has been the bane of astronomers for years. The lights of Main Street are increasingly hazing out the night sky, obscuring stars and fogging photographic plates with man-made photons of light.

Soon — perhaps as soon as twenty-five years — light pollution will end earthbound optical astronomy.

Already the 100-inch telescope at Mount Wilson in California has been rendered useless, except for spectroscopy, by the blinding haze of Los Angeles, and the 200-inch telescope at Mount Palomar is being affected by the twin pincers of city lights from Los Angeles and San Diego.

The villain of the light pollution drama is the mercury-vapor streetlight, which not only illuminates Main Streets all over the country, but also scatters its light into the sky, "blinding" telescopes and adding a few lines characteristic of mercury to the spectra from celestial bodies.

So how do you fight the lights of a city?

"We'd like to turn them off," said Dr. Raymond White, a research associate and lecturer in astronomy at the University of Arizona in Tucson.

However, acknowledging that they could not get Tucson to turn off its streetlights at night, Dr. White and his astronomer colleagues proposed a city ordinance prohibiting installation of new mercury vapor lights and requiring shields and filters for those already existing.

Tucson adopted the ordinance in 1972, after three years of lobbying on the part of White and his associates. (With over 100 astronomers working at half a dozen observatories, Tucson is the largest center of astronomical work in the world. That accounts for many millions of dollars per year for Tucson, so the city does not want its astronomers to be unhappy.)

The term "light pollution" is a made-up word and something of a misnomer as light itself doesn't "pollute" anything, Dr. White explained. The situation that causes problems for astronomers is a large number of light sources emitting low-frequency light waves that strike particulants (dust, hydrocarbon pollutants, etc.) suspended in the air, and scatter. That scattering causes the light to spread across the sky and interfere with observations.

The ordinance proposed by Dr. White and his colleagues cannot control the particulants — that is under the auspices of the air quality control and health departments. The ordinance was designed to control the amount of light that is spread around the city. And even then, they could not control much, Dr. White said.

Mercury vapor lamps generate light by sending an electrical charge through a quantity of mercury vapor and caught in the "bulb" of the lamp. The basic problem is that the mercury vapor lamp throws off more waves than is necessary, or even used by the human eye. Most of the "light"

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generated lies in the low-frequency bands below 4500 angstroms, where the eye is virtually blind.

Light tends to scatter more as the frequency of its waves gets smaller. Thus the low-frequency blue and ultraviolet light scatters most, while red scatters least.

Mercury vapor lamps generate most of their light in these low-frequency ranges. Some light visible to the human eye is thrown off, of course, but most of the light is in the blue to ultraviolet range, which is useless to human sight and positively harmful to optical astronomy.

By adding filters to the streetlights that cut off the low spectrum end of mercury vapor emanations, part of the problem is solved; by requiring shields that point the light downward the scattering can be controlled. But the ideal solution is to use streetlamps that do not generate so much light in the low frequency bands.

Sodium vapor lamps fit the bill like a glove.

Most of the light generated by sodium vapor lamps lies above the 5500 angstrom range (the yellow-green bands), which is the light best suited for human eyesight. (Having evolved under a yellow star, the human eye sees best with a yellowish light, Dr. White said.)

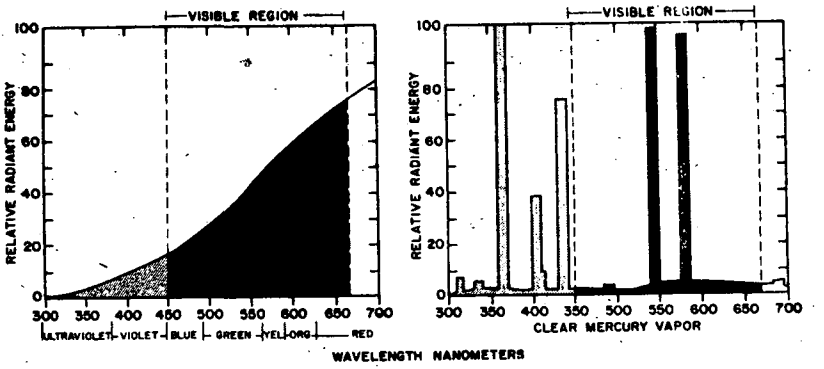
At present there are two kinds of sodium vapor lights on the market, a high pressure lamp and a low pressure lamp. If the vacuum in the chamber containing the sodium vapor is not strong (high pressure lamp), the light emitted is a lighter, paler yellow; if the vacuum is strong (low pressure) the light is a deeper yellow-orange. Both lights are efficient for sight, but the low pressure lamp is better for astronomers because of the almost total absence of low-frequency emanations, Dr. White said.

It was the sodium vapor lamps that caused the largest problem for the ordinance. The yellow color of sodium vapor light looks different than the normal blue of mercury vapor lamps and takes some getting used to, Dr. White pointed out. Women objected to the yellow light because it made their makeup look strange, he said, and police didn't like the new color because they said it was difficult to determine the color of an escaping car in a high-speed chase.

"But," Dr. White added wryly, "it has been a long time since there was a high-speed chase through my neighborhood at night."

Once sodium vapor lamps are installed and people get used to them, the problems clear up, he said. And, as an added benefit, the electricity cost of sodium lamps is considerably less than that of mercury vapor lamps.

The effect of the streetlight ordinance has been helpful, Dr. White continued. The night sky has been considerably cleaned up for astronomers, although the growth of cities will ruin optical observations in about 25 years. By then, however, most astronomical work will be done from space, "leaving the scut work" for Earth-side observatories, Dr. White said.



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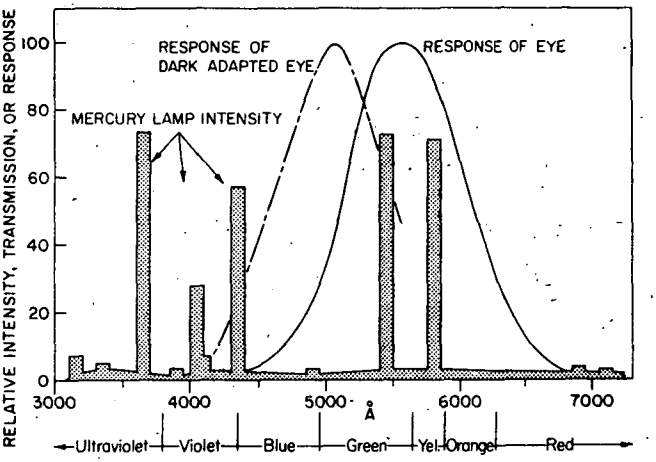

A diagram showing the spectral energy distribution of a clear mercury lamp, the spectral range of response of the eye, and the transmission of a "visual" filter designed to suppress ultraviolet and violet light.

Great 10^{24} Grandfathers — by Britton Bloom

SCIENTISTS HAVE added another possible picture in the family album of humanity — the Aegyptopithecus.

Working in the Fayum Depression (60 miles southwest of Cairo, Egypt), Elwyn Simons, a primatologist from Duke University, has found a large enough number of remains of the Aegyptopithecus to draw conclusions about their lifestyle and place in the evolutionary chain leading to *Homo sapiens.*

The Aegyptopithecus, a tree-dwelling vegetarian, lived approximately 30 million years ago, during the Oligocene period, when the Fayum Depression was on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea with lush forests surrounding it. Physically the Aegyptopithecus looked much like a large house cat, and weighed from eight to eleven pounds.

The range of weights follows sexually dimorphic lines, with males weighing ten to eleven pounds and females eight to nine. The sexual dimorphism extended into the jaws, as well: males had large canines, while females lacked the large fighting teeth.

That differentiation is a central point in placing Aegyptopithecus on the human evolutionary ladder, for it indicates a social structure in which males acted as fighters, protecting females in a "tribe," and had an order of dominance, similar to that of a baboon pack.

Simons believes the existence of a pack at so ancient a time indicates the Aegyptopithecus possessed a certain intelligence — at least enough to recognize "enemy" apes from other groups.

Solitary apes, or those who travel in mated pairs, do not need that intelligence, nor the sex-related difference in jaw sizes, according to Simons.

While placing Aegyptopithecus on the evolutionary tree to humanity, Simons' conclusions also edge the Propliopithecus, one of the earliest proto-apes, off.

On the basis of similar sex-related differences in the sizes of their jaws, the Propliopithecus was originally thought to be on

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the line of human evolution. But Dr. Simons feels the Aegyptopithecus (living about the same time as Propliopithecus) is much closer to the Dryopithecus, generally believed to have been on the direct line of *Homo sapien* evolution.

What's in a Wave?

by Britton Bloom

THE EQUATIONS of quantum mechanics have given scientists an insight into the workings of atoms that lie at the root of matter and life itself.

Since the mid-1920's, when French physicist Louis de Broglie discovered a way to describe the wave and particle characteristics of electrons, physicists have held the key to understanding how atoms and molecules act and react with one another. Once the basic building blocks were understood, there was no limit to how far that understanding could carry the human mind.

However, the mathematical equations for such actions and reactions are so endlessly complicated they were virtually unusable. Calculating the quantum chemical characteristics of the most simple atom, Hydrogen (one proton, one electron), is beyond all but the most brilliant physicists.

So scientists stood before the universe with a key to its mysteries and could not use it.

But now with the more sophisticated computers, the quantum equations are becoming accessible. And the uses are staggering.

A group of chemists at Johns Hopkins University, led by Dr. Joyce Kaufman, is pioneering the work in using quantum characteristics of molecules to predict what effect those molecules will have on human beings. At present, the chemists are using the equations to calculate the possible carcinogenic dangers of substances in the environment.

Working with Dr. Walter Koski, Dr. Kaufman has also analyzed the quantum characteristics of morphine and its near-relative nalorphine, both narcotics that kill pain. By analyzing the electrical fields of the drugs' molecules, Drs. Kaufman and Koski could demonstrate how these fields fit together with some of the electrical fields of the body's molecules, like parts of a puzzle. They learned how the electrical fields interact to change the body's perception of pain.

The technique also allows scientists to determine the effects of any molecule on the body's molecules. And if a known molecule does not produce the desired effect on the body's molecular structure, the scientist can construct a theoretical model of a new molecule, with all the right electrical fields in all the right places, to produce that effect. With the knowledge of what molecules need to be affected in what way, a model molecule which will theoretically produce the desired effect can be "constructed" by a computer. After that, it is up to the laboratory technicians to synthesize the actual chemical that fits the bill.

The advance represented by quantum analysis is remarkable, particularly in view of the years Paul Ehrlich spent at the turn of this century patiently testing 605 compounds by trial and error until he came across his famous 606th, dioxy-diamino-arsenobenzol-dihydro-chloride, the cure for syphilis.

The applications of this technique are obvious, and already doctors and pharmaceutical manufacturers are expressing interest, as are health agencies and even the United States Department of Defense.

By applying quantum analysis to neurotransmitters — the substances that transmit impulses in the nervous systems of animals — Dr. Kaufman hopes a greater knowledge of behavior in humans and animals can be achieved.

Aside from the medical (and apparently military) uses for the analysis and formation of useful drugs, quantum analysis is providing a bridge to unify the increasingly departmentalized sciences. Since all matter is made up of the same basic building blocks, an astronomer studying the rings of Saturn is, in one sense, dealing with the same thing as the psychologist trying to understand schizophrenic delusions. At the molecular level, all matter seems pretty similar, and by calculating the quantum mechanical wave functions, perhaps we will come to see the relation between segmented worms and politicians.

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SEEDS OF THE FUTURE
A Lady Never Tells Her Age

by Tom Easton

FIFTY YEARS ago, Edwin Hubble discovered that the universe was expanding. The further a galaxy was from Earth, the faster it was moving away, and distance and velocity could be related by a conversion factor now called the Hubble factor. Not long after Hubble measured his factor, astronomers plotted the outward movements of the galaxies backward in time. They found that the entire universe had been a single lump of matter—the monobloc of Big Bang fame—about twenty billion years ago.

That is a conveniently long time ago. When the Big Bang happened, the universe was nothing but hydrogen, plus a smidgin of helium. All heavier elements were produced by fusion reactions in the interiors of stars formed later on; the heaviest elements were produced in stellar explosions—novas and supernovas. In the fifteen billion years before our own sun and Earth were formed, a large supply of heavy elements was built up. These elements comprise the substance of our bodies, our food and drink and air, even the ground we walk on. If the universe were younger, there would have been less time for stellar cookery, a smaller supply of heavy elements, and our world and our existence might be impossible.

Or so we have thought. The cosmology and the physics tie neatly together, but the cosmology depends on the accuracy of the Hubble factor, and if that is off, the physics may be off too.

It is relatively simple to measure the velocity with which a star is moving away from an observer. Each element, when heated to incandescence, emits light at specific, characteristic wavelengths, or frequencies. If a star is moving away from an observer, these frequencies are shifted toward the red end of the spectrum; they are said to be "red-shifted." The phenomenon is precisely analogous to the deepening of a siren receding down the road. Both shifts, for light and for sound, are Doppler shifts, and in both cases the extent of the shift is a measure of velocity away from the observer.

It is less simple to measure distances in astronomy, but it can be done. Given two stars of equal brightness, the further one will seem dimmer to an observer, and the ratio of their brightnesses is a measure of distance. Traditionally, astronomers have used stars of a type characterized by relatively constant brightnesses, the Cepheid variables. These stars can be identified even in other galaxies by the fluctuations in the amount of light they emit, and when their apparent brightnesses are compared they indicate distance. Distances of galaxies too far off to have visible Cepheids can be estimated by comparing brightnesses of galaxies of similar type.

The trouble is that all estimates of distance are just that: estimates. Different methods give different results, and because different methods are appropriate for different galaxies, very different values for the Hubble constant can be obtained. In the past decade, values different by a factor of two have been obtained.

The problem may have been removed or reduced by a new method of estimating distance. This method depends on the fact that spiral galaxies rotate, and when seen edge on this rotation tends to broaden emission lines in a galaxy's spectrum. The broadening occurs because one edge of the galaxy rotates toward an Earth-bound observer while the other rotates away; light emitted from the two edges of the galaxy is shifted by different amounts. Some astronomers have lately been examining the light emitted by hydrogen at a wavelength of 21 centimeters (a radio wavelength); when emitted by a distant galaxy seen edge-on, this light appears in a spectrum as a thick line with two horns; the separation between the horns is the measure of rotational speed. Since speed

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depends on galactic mass, and brightness also depends on mass, this provides a way of ensuring that two galaxies have the same actual brightness. If they have different apparent brightnesses, they must be at different distances, and the ratio of their distances is determined by the ratio of their brightnesses. If one of the galaxies is close enough for the Cepheid variable method to work well and its distance to be calculated more or less accurately, the distance to the other can also be calculated, and apparently with more accuracy than is possible with other methods. As a result, a more accurate Hubble constant can be calculated.

The method has been applied by Marc Aaronson of Steward Observatory in Tucson, Jeremy Mould of Kitt Peak Observatory near Tuscon, and John Huchra of Harvard-Smithsonian Center of Astrophysics in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Their value for the Hubble constant is about 100 kilometers per second per megaparsec (a megaparsec is 3.26 million light years), about twice the value accepted until now. As a result, the age of the universe since the monobloc explosion turns out to be only ten billion years, half the span we used to believe in and twice the age of the Earth itself.

This is like telling a forty-year-old executive he's really just a twenty-year-old college kid: "Sorry, fella. We forgot that a calendar's gotta have twelve months, not six." Where did those wrinkles come from? And how about all those heavy elements? Could five billion years possibly cook up enough for an Earth to form? For iron ore and solid earth and air to be? Or could something be wrong with the physics that describes how and how quickly all those elements appeared? If the new Hubble constant checks out, this is sure to be a hot question for the physicists. The answers could be even hotter. ●

Is there anyone who hears?

The Songs ape of Earth

by R. G. Steinhauer

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THEY WERE a weed people with weed dreams and weed thoughts. A million years before, when the race was young, they had laced the stars together with their caravans into a vast empire. But the Empire became a Commonwealth, and that became a splintered group of feudal alliances, and those broke down to pockets of barbarous isolation. In the end, they were pounded into dust and the white stars wheeled silently overhead.

In the intervening eons, the spent souls drifted like pollen over the shriveled, dying planet, and fell on barren soil, never to be reborn. Even the stars were denied these lost souls now, as the skies were swallowed in gray billowing clouds of dust and the roiling atmospheric soups of a runaway greenhouse effect.

One day soon there would be no oxygen left at all. The carbon dioxide continued to bubble out of the planet's limestone reserves as the mild sulphuric acid rains continued their gentle insinuations, which long ago had weathered the great works of man into oblivion. With fewer plants surviving and with the great oceans in large part dead, the little oxygen being produced was hungrily consumed by small burrowing creatures who clung to life and by so doing added in their small way to the ever-increasing carbon dioxide.

Only the weeds thrived.

The self-regulating orbital machine that had been a planetary home for twelve billion persons was sputtering to an overdue shut-down of crucial components that struggled to adjust, but could not, in the unbalanced ecosystem.

It is said that spirits flit from creature to creature in a procession of higher lives as the soul continues its eternal quest for the fuller consciousness of God. But how and where, on a world such as this, do twelve billion spent souls move on their glorious cycle when there are no further beings of higher moral substance? Even if there were the rare occurance of higher forms, since they are already occupied by souls of their own, and since only one soul can inhabit a living form at a time, the spirits can naught but wait upon the rare entities, to inhabit at the proper instant the quivering form in the womb. How then could twelve billion souls hold on, while a dying world waits for new colonists and their unborn children that may never come? The answer is simple. Some souls tread water by pulsing in the warm furry bodies of the few simple creatures still surviving; the greater portion mark cosmic time by nodding in the one dull but successful form left: the prickly, twisted, ugly weed.

The slowly rotating galactic disc was as a great toothed cog, the escape wheel, for a vast clockwork of the Master Time-Keeper. It turned ever so slowly, but turn if did.

It was dusk when the ship landed.

It was long and thin and silver. The huge metal hatch swung open and a young man leaped to the dusty ground.

"I'm here!" he cried. "I've come back."

The dust swirled and the weeds bent to listen. It was nearly sunset on this world, and the diffused shadows of the forgotten sagebrush fell long across the forgotten hills.

"I didn't forget!" shouted the young man into the stirring breeze.

He was tall and slim. His face and hands were tanned by the many suns of the many worlds in a corner of Empire's realm that had somehow held together from the old days and now was reaching again. His hair was a pale blond, bleached by

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these same stars. His eyes were blue and steel clear, cocled by the frigid emptiness of intergalactic space. He was young. He was of the race known as Earthmen.

"I know you're thinking that I shouldn't have come back," he said, speaking to the darkening desert. "But I had to. They told me there was nothing here anymore, but I had to come. I had to . . ." He stopped and looked to the yellow glow in the west. "I had to come *home*."

Small gusts of wind brushed against his face, warmly, softly. He bent his head, holding back the tears, "Thank you," he whispered.

"I knew you'd be lying here, thinking you'd been forgotten. Perhaps you never even knew that a whole new race sprang from one of your forgotten colonies. At least not until now. I felt you would *want* to know."

Weeds and withered grass bent toward his feet; he moved closer so that some of the dust fell from them as a white mist over his shiny brown boots.

"I came back to let you know that Mankind has never forgotten you. Oh, we've turned whole galaxies into night-lights, re-built planets, enclosed stars for more efficient energy management, broken the faster-than-light rules to take us anywhere, and bent time just enough to do strange new things, but it's you we sing about. The songs are of Earth, do you hear?" His lips trembled. "It's about your ancient cities and your green hills that our ballads swoon. It's *your* outrageous heroes that our songs immortalize, and it's your fair, sweet climate we've built into every world we've settled. The songs? Nay! It's your quests, your dreams, your myths, your adventurers, your Gods, your ideas and your precious, simple triumphs that formed our genes, which spun our nerves, and move our fingers to strum our uds and guitarim for our songs of Earth. The songs *are* Earth! Do you hear?"

The sun had set on this perpetually shrouded world, but through a rare broken area where the yellow-brown clouds had piled themselves in strange concentric rings that marked the ship's interdimensional faster-than-light passage, starlight drifted down like gentle rain. The young Earthman sensed the presence of a vanished people clustering about him, but saw only vapors rising as the cool night air touched the warm soil.

"Is there anyone who hears?" he cried. "Is there anyone who cares?"

In the silence, the hairs along his neck bristled, and the Earthman smiled.

"Good! Then know that all the universe is charted, and every world had heard the word of Man. And in this universe it *has* mattered that there was a race of Earthmen, and that there was an Earth." And then, thinking of the souls across the dark oceans who would not yet know of his arrival, he shouted: "Tell them that I came! Tell them that Man has redeemed his promise! Tell them that God or No God, *Man's* life and death and being has been his own redemption!" His words fell echoing across the pale countryside, carried by a rising wind.

The wind itself was but a small part of the atmospheric disturbance caused by the ship's punching entrance as the shock waves sent rippling around the world converged on themselves at some point opposite on the globe, over the calm gray ocean. A massive high-pressure area formed, and a vast fetch was in the making as long high waves moved out with an energy the tired seas had not felt in a million years.

He turned and was gone. The weeds, listening, passed the message through their roots to the old Earth, pulsing feebly. The ground shifted, as a dreamer restless in his sleep, and a sighing wind rolled over the dying world.

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For the first time in a million years, a different type of rain began to fall from the gray clouds rolling in on troubled ocean fronts. It was not the cold, dilute sulfuric acid that the leeched ridges had come to know. It was a warm salty rain, and it would run down the wrinkled, weather-scarred cheeks of the hills for a long time to come .

WONDERS OF THE GODS?

by J. J. Miller

The Evolution of a Savage

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I WAS ALONE in camp the day that he walked in.

The woman had gone off to a nearby lake to pick tender water-reed stalks. The children were playing somewhere, Alrick, my eldest, trying out the carved throwing stick that Old Father had just made for him.

My younger brother Fenic, Old Father, and wife-brother Mammoc were out hunting. Mammoc was living with us that season. Other bands didn't tolerate him sometimes. True, he tended toward laziness and on the hunt he was about as quiet as a wounded tusker. But nobody could tell stories and jokes the way Mammoc could. Who could forget his joke about the wandering hunter and the fisherman's daughter?

I like a good hunt myself, but that day I had stayed in camp to put the finishing touches on the fine-chipped knife I was making for my brother. With all due modesty, there was no one in the whole clan who could work flint like me. I inherited the skill from Old Father, I guess. Ah, he was a sharp hawk of a man! When he was younger no one could follow a trail like him. He was tireless and keen-eyed and sure-handed with the stabbing spear and throwing stick. Now his eyes were failing him and he could no longer work the hard stone like he once used to because of the sickness that twisted his fingers. Lately, since Old Mother had died in her sleep last season, he had been spending a lot of time on the hunt to keep his mind occupied. Either that or he played with the children, carving them little intricate toys of soft wood that his hands could still handle. Those hands were still clever.

Well, on that day I was hunkered down comfortably before the cook-fire putting the fine touches on the edges of the knife by pressure flaking with a bit of antler. The smell coming from the bubbling pot was making my stomach grumble. I was about to put down the knife and grab a snack when he came from the surrounding trees into the camp clearing.

He was alone and appeared unarmed. I watched him come into the camp, wrinkling my brow in concentration, but knowing at the same time that I had never seen him before. Nor had I ever seen anyone like him.

He was huge, taller and broader than any man I'd ever seen. But his face was almost womanish, not entirely because it lacked any kind of beard. It was soft, plump almost, like that of a baby or young girl. His body was covered by a strange garment, neck to feet. It looked to be of a texture totally unlike hide and it certainly wasn't the color of any animal I'd ever seen. It was as bright as the sun on rising and glittering upon it were narrow bands of some other kind of material that gleamed in the light like sun off calm water. It was rather handsome.

He just looked down at me where I was squatting comfortably before the always-burning fire. I thought him curiously deficient in manners, for he spoke neither words of greeting or identification. The thought then struck me that he was either an outcast or ashamed of his clan. Although outcasts and loners can sometimes be dangerous, I felt no real fear of him. His eyes lacked the madness that burns in the eyes of such men when they are dangerous. Instead, his eyes were soft and watery, almost like those of a doe.

"Welcome stranger," I said courteously. "Will you sit and have something to eat?"

I put my antler-tine flaker on the ground and gestured at the pot that was bubbling slowly over the fire. It contained a particularly savory stew that had turtle, deer, squirrel, water-plant, rabbit, tuber, and a little nut-flour that we had left over from our cold-season stores. He shook his head, his nostrils flaring slightly as he sniffed the delicious aroma coming from the pot. For a moment a look almost of distaste passed over his features, but I might have imagined it.

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Finally he spoke.

"I have come from a very distance to see you," he said, his voice deep and resonant. He spoke with a peculiar accent, but that is not unusual. Our people are a far-ranging lot and the distances sometimes cause our words to blur their meanings for each other's ears.

"Oh," I asked, interested. "Are you from over the mountains, from the land that has always a burning sun? I have kin in those parts I haven't seen for years."

"No," he said, laughing a little. "I come from much farther. I come from what you see as one of the burning bits of light in the night."

"Ummm, I see."

I looked at him closely. He didn't appear insane, but sometimes you can't tell. Still, there was his strange appearance and stranger garments.

"Which light have you come from?" I asked politely.

He laughed again, louder this time.

"You wouldn't understand if I told you."

I swallowed his insult. Did he think that I had no more sense than the smallest child? Even Alrick, though he's only six or seven gatherings of the clan, could name the hundred or so brightest lights. How else could we find our way at night? How could we return to the choicest nut-groves, the favorite watering-places of the animals? True, there are uncountable lights in the whole sky, but if the stranger couldn't tell me the one he came from, at least he could tell me the general area of the sky!

I caught myself short in my anger, realizing that I was thinking like I *believed* the madman.

"Well," I replied, determined to humor him somewhat, "it must have been a long trek. Are there trails to follow, then, coming down from the sky?"

He didn't smile this time, but he smiled a smile that I didn't like. It was the superior smile of some bastard who knows where a tusker had just died and he'd rather let the meat rot than tell you the location out of his dislike for you.

"I didn't walk. I came in a, well, vehicle, an enclosed container like your hut there," he said, pointing at our hide and woven-reed shelter. "Of course, my vehicle was much bigger and much sturdier."

This fellow should get together with Mammoc, I thought. A large shelter that moved by itself!

"I came down last night over there," he said, gesturing with a sweep of his arm past the belt of trees from which he had emerged.

It hit me all of a sudden. I remembered the roaring noise, like the sound of a far-falling waterfall, that had woken me last night. And I remembered the ground-quivers. I had dismissed it all in my sleepiness as the ground tremors that sometimes shake this region coupled with the noise of the dreambeast that I was hunting in my sleep.

He must have noticed my change of expression, for he said, "So you believe me now?"

I nodded yes, hoping that his moving shelter hadn't crushed the prime berrypatch that grew in the meadow behind the trees.

"Why have you come, then? Are you looking for better hunting?"

His laughter was loud and I didn't like its tone.

"I don't need to chase animals for my sustenance. And you won't have to either! I've come to help you, I've come to show you many wonderful things! Look!"

His hand went to a pouch cunningly sewn into the side of his garment and came out with a handful of tiny objects. I peered interestedly at his out-thrust hand.

"Do you know what these are?" he asked, and then answered his own question

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before I could open my mouth, "They're seeds. You put them in the ground and they grow into food-bearing plants. You'll be able to live in one place and not have to move about all the time to search for food."

I stared at him for several seconds before I regained my composure and softened my gaze. I knew then that what ever his accomplishments in building marvelous moving shelters, he was quite mad. Who else but a madman would believe the fact that plants grow from seeds is a great revelation?

I thought then that I'd really better humor him.

"Well, that's all very interesting. But, personally, I like to move around a bit. A change of scenery every now and then does me good."

He frowned at me briefly.

"We'll discuss it more fully later when you realize the implications of what I've told you. But meanwhile I have other wonders to show you."

"Like what?" I asked, expressing polite interest.

He returned the seeds to his pouch and brought out, well, it was *something*. I don't know what it was made of, but parts of it shown like the stone that runs molten from the broken mountains, the stone that flows as burning liquid and then hardens to make the best material there is for chipping into sharp tools. Without a word he pointed the object at some nearby trees. He made no move except to flex tiny muscles of his wrist and hand. I could see them jump under his skin.

And the trees shattered with an awesome sound.

I was impressed.

His smile, smug and self-satisfied, was again on his lips.

"What do you think of that?"

"Well," I said, "that was certainly something. But—"

I trailed off and he looked at me suspiciously.

"But what?" he asked, his face clouding visibly.

"Look," I said reasonably, "how can you use that for hunting? It would mangle the animal so badly that, why, you'd waste most of the carcass, to say nothing of the blood and the organs—"

He clenched his lips together tightly, I wondered if in anger.

"Are you so simple that you don't realize what I'm giving you? What about your enemies?"

"Enemies?" I repeated, somewhat blankly.

"Yes, you know, those whom you hate! Those whom you have to fight so that you can live! Those whom you'd like to kill!"

I thought about it carefully for a few moments. There was no one I wanted to kill, no one I *had* to fight. Oh, there was the occasional bully or the fellow whom you just couldn't get along with. The bully and the madman (not those of the harmless sort, just the violent ones) were usually turned out by the clan if they got to be too much trouble. And if a man annoys you too much, you simply don't band with him and you avoid him at clan gatherings. Like I do my older brother Starn. If someone persists in annoying you, you might have to face him man to man, like I did Rufo about four gatherings ago. He had been such a general pain that the clan was glad to get rid of him and I didn't even have to pay man-price to his close kinsmen.

I thought about it carefully and decided that there was no one to use such a weapon on.

"I have no enemies," I finally said.

My reply somehow angered the stranger.

"You don't understand, you primitive, ignorant fool," he said with some vehemence. "You don't understand the wonders, the powers that I'm offering you.

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You can settle down in one place, all your people can build permanent dwellings and live together. You'll be able to grow your own food, you'll have time for the arts, you'll become civilized!"

His voice rose in anger and he spoke words I couldn't understand. I began to see that I had totally misjudged him. Hidden until now but buring deep in his liquid eyes was a spark of madness the likes of which I had never seen.

"I like the way we live," I said quietly. "The earth is good to us and gives us what we need. Sometimes it is difficult and we have to work hard, but there is no need to huddle together in crowded masses in these 'dwellings' that you speak of. I also don't like the idea of tending plants all day. I don't think that I'd like to be 'civilized'."

The thought of living permanently near Starn was unsettling. I knew that within a season we'd be at each other's throats. It was better this way when I saw him only during part of the year, the easiest and most carefree part.

"Savage," the stranger said, the contempt in his voice now unhidden. "Ignorant savage! I would have been like a beneficient father leading his children to the light. I would have given you wonders the likes of which you've never imagined. You would have sat at my knees and learned what it is like to be men instead of animals."

His voice rose louder and he gestured wildly with the hand that held his terrible destroying device.

"You will all *still* be my children, even if I have to force you to go my way. *I* know what you need, *I* know what is best for you. I am superior mentally and physically and I have the power to force you onto my path. Instead of a father among his children I will be a god among his worshippers—"

He spoke with a frightening intensity. His madness was fully upon him. I looked in his eyes and I saw how he held himself above us, and I thought upon the way he wanted us to go, and I remembered the power that he carried in his soft hands.

He stared coldly at me.

"You will see that my way is the proper way. You will thank me eventually, or at least your children will. You will be my first worshipper and I'll bend the rest of your people to my will. It will be a simple thing—"

My legs were gathered comfortably under me and I shot upwards like the uncoiling of an angry snake, my right hand, holding the knife I had been making for my younger brother, pointing straight out like it was the head of a spear that was my entire arm.

I took the stranger in the throat and the knife slid in easily. It grated upon his neckbone and I slashed sideways, ripping open his throat and severing the great vessel that carried the blood to his head.

He looked at me incredulously, his blood showering the ground in a bright fountain. He opened his mouth but no words would come. For a moment the stranger looked like a bewildered child as he watched his dream pump out of his body in a shower of blood, and then he tumbled backwards loosely.

I regarded the bloodied knife in my hand. I would have to make another, for this one was stained with the blood of a madman. There is no honor in killing one such as he, but sometimes a dangerous animal must be destroyed to protect the people.

I looked at the dead stranger for a moment and then spoke softly.

"You wanted things which weren't yours," I said. "I have no need for another father, for I have one whom I love dearly. And I have no need of another god, for I worship the Earth who gave me birth and feeds me with the sweat of my brow and

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to whom I'll someday return. And no man should force another to follow unwanted paths."

I looked at his terrible device that had tumbled from his hand and now lay shining at my feet. It was beautiful, in a deadly sort of way. I picked it up.

Freeing my other hand by sticking my knife into my belt, I stooped over and grasped the fabric of the stranger's clothes. It felt smooth and strange to my hand.

He was bigger than me but it was no problem to drag him away from the camp so that neither the scavenger beasts no his odor would disturb us. I would have buried him but I didn't know if the Earth wanted his body.

His device I threw far into the deep river by which we were camped. The soiled knife followed it into the water.

I went back to the camp thinking that I had a story even Mammoc couldn't top.

John Miller

My wife Gail and I live in Albuquerque, New Mexico, with our four cats (Fafhrd, Shadowjack, the Phantom Stranger and Lord Dunsany), where she is an associate manager of a bookstore and I'm working for my Ph.D. in anthropology at the University of New Mexico. I've loved science fiction and fantasy ever since the third grade when my mother (much to her eventual dismay) bought me a paperback edition of E.R. Burroughs' *At the Earth's Core* (Hi, Mom). My two dreams are to play the outfield for the New York Mets and to become an established science fiction author. While it's probably too late for the former, I'm still working at the latter.

As a practicing (well, sometimes practicing) archaeologist, I have two pet peeves. The first is the manner in which pre-agricultural man has been treated by virtually every fantasy or science fiction writer from E. R. Burroughs on down. The brutish, degraded cave-man stereotype predominates the portrayal of such societies. (This in itself is interesting because it has become apparent that man, or at least H. sapiens, has never really lived in caves for any great length of time). My second peeve concerns the "theories" of von Daniken and their popularity among people who should really know better (i.e., people with I.Q.'s equal to or greater than the average Australopithicene).

WHY WE CHOSE THIS STORY

We liked this refreshing slant on savagery, then and now — interesting to think about. It seems Evolution has delivered plenty of negatives along with the positives, as Miller points out in this sensitive fantasy.

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the Amorous Umbrella

MARVIN KAYE

The Professor and his Incredible Umbrella

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